Un alma libanesa – A Lebanese Soul

Identity construction in the Lebanese-Argentine diaspora community

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 1989, Carlos Saúl Menem, an Argentine-born son of Syrian immigrants was elected President of Argentina with the financial support of the Syrian and Libyan governments.[1] On March 17, 1992, a bomb detonated at the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 22 people. Hezbollah later claimed responsibility for the attack.[2] On July 18, 1994, a second attack occurred at the Israeli-Argentine Mutual Association (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina — AMIA), a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, killing 85 and wounding an additional 300 individuals. Although the case remains unresolved, Hezbollah, Iran and Syria are considered the most likely perpetrators.[3]

These stories, which made headlines around the world, suggest that Argentina has historically been contentiously entangled in Middle Eastern affairs. The main Israeli institutions in the Argentine capital were the targets of terrorist attacks, suggesting that the political tensions between Arabs and Israelis extended beyond the region to shape life in other parts of the world. However, behind the political headlines lies a more complex story of diaspora communities, characterized by more questions than answers: Who are the Middle Eastern diaspora communities in Argentina? How did they bridge the gap between Argentina and their Middle Eastern home countries? Which factors influenced the development of their diaspora communities? How do social factors like religion, family and culture influence the development of diaspora politics?

[1] Carlos Escudé and Beatriz Gurevich, "Limits to Governability, Corruption and Transnational Terrorism:
[2] Ibid 128
[3] Ibid 128

This study explores the history of the Lebanese diaspora community in Buenos Aires and the personal accounts of its members, with the intent of discussing one element of the complex Lebanese-Argentine community: Lebanese-Argentine identity construction. How do members of the Lebanese-Argentine community understand their Lebanese identity? How does the development of that identity compare to the identity construction of others in the Lebanese diaspora?

The Lebanese-Argentine diaspora is an intriguing case because of the unique histories of both nations and the comparatively large number of Lebanese-descendants living in Argentina. On one hand, Argentina is a nation populated by the descendants of immigrants from around the world, millions of whom entered the country between the mid-1800s and the advent of World War I in 1914.[4] A popular Latin American expression goes so far as to joke that "the Mexicans descended from the Aztecs; the Peruvians descended from the Incas; the Argentines descended from the boats." On the other hand, Lebanon is a nation that has historically been characterized by massive emigration; though it is difficult to measure the number of Lebanese emigrants and their descendants living abroad, estimates generally fall between 4 million and 13 million individuals.[5] The Lebanese-Argentine community developed at the intersection of these two significant migration flows making it an important case for better understanding both the experience of immigrant groups in Argentina and of Lebanese emigrants in diaspora.

In addition to the historical significance of the Argentine-Lebanese case, this study has contemporary implications. In the context of increasing global attention to the Middle East, the

[4] Walter F. Willcox, "Statistics of Migrations, National Tables, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile," *International Migrations, Volume I: Statistics,* ed. Walter F. Willcox, (1929): 539-547.
[5] Thibault Jaulin, "Lebanese Politics of Nationality and Emigration," *European University Institute Working Papers* 29 (2006): 1-15.

issue of national identity carries new and important connotations. Over time, the labels used to describe people of Middle Eastern origin have shifted in significance. Today, identifying as "Arab" or "Lebanese," for instance, is perceived in the context of politically charged history like the Arab-Israeli Conflict, the Lebanese Civil War, and contemporary political unrest in the region. In Argentina, the political events of the 1990s add another level of complexity. However, limiting discussion of the Lebanese-Argentine community to these events reduces and misrepresents the vast majority of the community. In order to combat the prejudices at play, it is important to complicate the image of the community and provide a better idea of the numerous complex factors at play in Argentina's Lebanese community.

The political events of the 1990s and the increased international attention to Middle Eastern politics during the 21st century have contributed to a formation of a common misperception of the Lebanese-Argentine diaspora community as a political entity. However, the reality is much more complex. The Lebanese-Argentine diaspora community's identity is constructed in a uniquely Argentine combination of dynamic cultural, religious, political and familial identities that reflect the national and personal histories of its members.

The following chapter will present background information on the Lebanese-Argentine community. The history of the community will be presented in four major periods: (1) the migration period, 1850 to 1930, (2) the assimilation period, 1930 to 1975, (3) the crisis period, 1975 to 1990, and (4) the resurgence, 1990 to 2000. The major historical events during these time periods are briefly described and the principal trends in the identity development of the community are discussed. The historical background is followed by basic theoretical framework of diaspora studies, including a definition of diaspora communities and a discussion of the factors shaping diaspora identities.

The following chapter introduces the subjects of the studies, five Lebanese-Argentine individuals interviewed in Buenos Aires in 2013. The content of the interviews is analyzed in the next chapter. Taking into account the histories of Argentina, Lebanon and the Lebanese-Argentine diaspora community, the chapter discusses the identity development of the interviewed individuals. Identity is discussed in terms of four common factors in identity formation: (1) family, (2) politics, (3) religion, and (4) cultural practices. The chapter analyzes the trends within the community that are unique to Argentina and those that are characteristic of broader tendencies within the Lebanese diaspora, demonstrating the intersection social and political identities and elaborating on the numerous complexities in Lebanese-Argentine identities.

Chapter Two: Historical and Theoretical Background

History of the Lebanese-Argentine Community

Migration Period (1850 - 1930)

Between 1857 and 1924, the population of Argentina increased by nearly 3 million, the result of massive, state-encouraged immigration. The vast majority of these immigrants were European; 45% arrived from Italy, and another 35% came from Spain. On par with the next largest groups of white immigrants, the French (3.7%) and the Russians (3.4%), were Arabic-speaking Ottoman citizens from the region of Greater Syria.[1] These immigrants, who will be referred to as "Lebanese-Syrians" in the historical periods prior to the formation of the modern-day states of Syria and Lebanon in the 1940s, constituted 3.6% of the total immigration to Argentina during the period and numbered over 103,000.[2] From this initial wave of immigration developed a substantial community of Lebanese-Syrian descent in Argentina.

Conditions in Greater Syria during the same period drove specific groups of Lebanese-Syrians to emigrate in hopes of securing a better future. Political changes in the region encouraged immigration. Throughout the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire underwent political changes that abolished the feudal economic system and allowed Lebanese-Syrian peasants new freedom of movement; the new ideas about freedom of movement encouraged both internal and

[1] "Greater Syria" refers to a region that extends beyond the borders of the contemporary state of Syria and encompasses the present-day states of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Iraq and Jordan. The region was under Ottoman rule until 1920, and immigrants from the area were labeled as "Turks" upon their arrival to Argentina, regardless of their specific region of origin within Ottoman Syria. As such, in discussing the first period, prior to the formation of the modern day states of Lebanon (1943) and Syria (1946), the immigrant community will be referred to as Lebanese-Syrian. In the contemporary period, the descendants of Lebanese-Syrian immigrants in Argentina identify either as Syrian or Lebanese and, as such, the diaspora community is referred to as Lebanese-Argentine.

[2] Willcox, "Statistics of Migrations," 539-547.

external migrations by poor Lebanese-Syrians.[3] Political reforms also created additional pressure to emigrate for Lebanese-Syrian Muslims, as the reforms introduced compulsory military service for Muslims.[4] The dramatic changes in Ottoman politics encouraged the first wave of mass emigration from Greater Syria.

The internal migrations allowed by political reforms aggravated the economic situation of poor Lebanese-Syrians, encouraging them to seek improved fortunes in other parts of the world. Poor masses from the north of the region flooded into the arable lands of the south at the beginning of the 20th century, increasing competition for work in the south and encouraging lower class, less skilled workers to seek wealth in the Americas; migration was such a popular solution to the population problem that agents traveled throughout the region encouraging migration.[5] In Argentina, Brazil and the United States, economic opportunities were numerous. The Pampas of Argentina offered seemingly unlimited opportunities in agricultural labor and the rapidly expanding city of Buenos Aires provided attractive opportunities for artisans and merchants.[6] As such, Argentina became a popular destination for Lebanese-Syrians seeking economic betterment.

Internal migrations also aggravated tensions between religious-cultural groups. Maronite Christians from the northern part of the region moved into the mixed regions of the south where they clashed with the Druze community.[7] In 1860, the tensions between the religious-cultural

[3] Steven Hyland, "'Arisen from Deep Slumber': Transnational Politics and Competing Nationalisms among Syrian Immigrants in Argentina, 1900-1922," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 43, no. 3 (2011): 547-574.
[4] Kemal H. Karpat, "The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 2 (1985): 175-209.
[5] Jeffrey Lesser, "(Re)Creating Ethnicity: Middle Eastern Immigration to Brazil," *The Americas* 53, no. 1 (1996): 45-65; Karpat, "Ottoman Emigration to America," 179.
[6] Ibid 179
[7] Leila Fawaz, "The City and the Mountain: Beirut's Political Radius in the Nineteenth Century as Revealed in the Crisis of 1860," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 489-495.

groups came to a head in Damascus when a coalition of Damascene Muslims and Druze attacked the Christian parts of the city.[8] Combined with the economic hardships faced by the predominantly Maronite northern peasants, ongoing persecution and the fear of continuing violence between the groups encouraged Maronites to leave Greater Syria through the beginning of the 20th century.[9] Regardless of the motivations of individuals, the clear trend in Greater Syria during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was one of mass emigration, in search of a better life in a new country.

Building a Diaspora Community

During the migration period, the Syrian-Lebanese community that developed in Argentina as immigrants settled down in their new country had a distinctive socio-cultural-economic profile which can be described in terms of the four previously-mentioned factors in identity construction: family, politics, religion and cultural practices.

The available data on immigrant marriages in Buenos Aires at the turn of the 20th century suggests that immigrants were overwhelmingly predisposed to marry other immigrants with the same country of origin. In 1936, approximately 60% of Buenos Aires heads of households had two foreign-born parents and an additional 19% had one foreign-born parent.[10] At the same time, 72% of Spanish-born immigrants married other Spanish-born immigrants, 60% of Italian-born immigrants married other Italian-born immigrants, and 76% of other Europeans married within their nationality as well.[11] Those who did choose to marry outside of their national group likely did so due to a gender imbalance within that community. While records do not specify the

[8] Ibid 489
[9] Lesser, "Recreating Ethnicity," 53.
[10] Susana Torrado, "Raíces de las Diferencias Etnicas en Argentina: Endogamía y Homogamía durante 1870-1930," *Sociedad* 23. Universidad de Buenos Aires.
[11] Ibid 17

particular rates of endogamous marriages among the Syrian-Lebanese community, it seems likely that the trend apparent in the other groups held in the case of the Syrian-Lebanese as well; this conclusion is supported by the fact that language barriers, religious and cultural differences, and a relatively low gender imbalance[12] likely encouraged endogamous marriages.

In terms of politics, the Lebanese-Syrian immigrants maintained strong connections to Lebanese politics throughout the initial migration period, in part by establishing and maintaining an extensive Arabic-language press system. The Lebanese-Syrian community regularly produced a vast number of Arabic-language publications, which varied in the opinions they expressed but consistently focused on the shifting politics of the Ottoman Empire and the uncertain fate of the Syrian region.[13] The Arabic-language press can be seen as a concrete manifestation of the connection Lebanese-Syrians living in the diaspora community in Argentina felt with their home region and its politics.

The Lebanese-Syrian community also sought and obtained a more direct method of participation in Middle Eastern affairs. In the early 1900s, activists within the community petitioned the Argentine and Ottoman governments, asking for the establishment of an Ottoman consulate in Argentina to protect community members – many of whom were still Ottoman citizens – and create a new channel for participation in Middle Eastern politics.[14] The immigrant community's interest in an Ottoman presence in Argentina indicated that members of the

[12] Women comprised one-third of the total Syrian-Lebanese immigrants during the peak migration period between 1899 and 1914, whereas only 21% of Italian immigrants were women; Sarah Gualtieri, "Gendering the Chain Migration Thesis: Women and Syrian Transatlantic Migration, 1878-1924," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 1 (2004): 67-78.
[13] Hyland, "Arisen from Deep Slumber," 560-561
[14] Ignacio Klich, "Argentine-Ottoman Relations and Their Impact on Immigrants from the Middle East: a History of Unfulfilled Expectations, 1910-1915," *The Americas* 50, no. 2 (1993): 177-205.

Lebanese-Syrian community continued to feel like a part of their home region and wished to remain politically involved in its affairs.

The Lebanese-Syrian community developing in Argentina did not reflect the diversity and contention evident in Lebanon in the late 19th century. Estimates suggest that roughly 60-80% of the Lebanese-Syrian arrivals to Argentina during the initial immigration period were Christian, with Muslims making up an additional 15-35% and Jews about 5%.[15] While the many Christian arrivals were from Maronite and East Orthodox traditions, their experience living in the Americas, a predominantly Roman Catholic region, led many Lebanese-Syrian Christians to convert to Roman Catholicism in order to better integrate with the other inhabitants of their new home.[16] As such, the early Lebanese-Syrian community was predominantly composed of Christians of various sects.

The Lebanese-Syrian community also maintained cultural norms by settling in concentrated areas within Argentina and interacting predominantly with other members of the community. Approximately half of all the Lebanese-Syrian immigrants settled in Buenos Aires, primarily in neighborhoods in the south of the city, and the other half established a community in the northwestern province of Tucumán.[17] Lebanese-Syrian peddlers and shops served their fellow immigrants, achieving success without interacting extensively with European immigrant groups.[18] The geographic concentration of the Lebanese-Syrian community and its relative

[15] Hyland, "Arisen from Deep Slumber," 557; Glady Jozami, "The Manifestation of Islam in Argentina," *The Americas* 53, no. 1 (1996): 67-85.
[16] Kenneth D. Wald, "Homeland Interests, Hostland Politics: Politicized Ethnic Identity among Middle Eastern Heritage Groups in the United States," *International Migration Review* 42, no. 2 (2008): 273-301.
[17] Hyland, "Arisen from Deep Slumber," 553.
[18] Gladys Jozami, "The Path from Trade to Power: the Sons of Syrians and Lebanese in the Military and in Foreign Affairs in Argentina," *The Muslim World* 92 (2002): 169-183.

commercial independence likely allowed for an isolated cultural "bubble" to develop that reflected the immigrants' home cultures.

In sum, the original immigrant community could be characterized as predominantly politically active Christians that were isolated from mainstream Argentine culture by a tendency towards endogamy, geographic concentration, and commercial self-sustainability.

Assimilation Period (1930-1975)

By 1930, Argentine policy had changed drastically, bringing an end to decades of mass immigration. In 1890, Argentine immigration policy actively encouraged immigration; according to Ashley Timmer and Jeffrey Williamson immigration was very open, including policies such as "free or subsidized land, immigration treaties or contracts with shipping companies, lodging, worker recruitment, easy naturalization, and legal property ownership."[19] However, by 1930, Argentine immigration policies had become significantly more selective, imposing restrictions on immigration by class and source-country.[20] The change in immigration policy slowed the influx of migrants, bringing the migration period to a close and ushering in a new period of assimilation.

The assimilation or integration of an immigrant community into the host culture is typically measured by observing four indicators: socio-economic status, including such elements

[19] Timmer and Williamson ranked immigration policies on a scale of -5 to 5, with -5 indicating fully closed policy and 5 indicating active state encouragement of immigration. In 1890, Argentina's policies reached a peak of openness, scoring a 4 on Timmer and Williamson's scale. The policies listed in the text are those characteristic of that ranking.
Ashley S. Timmer and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Immigration Policy Prior to the 1930s: Labor Markets, Policy Interactions, and Globalization Backlash," *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 4 (1998): 739-771.
[20] In 1930, Argentina scored just below -2 on the same scale. The selective policies mentioned in the text are the characteristic of that ranking.
Ibid 741-743.

as occupational diversity, wage equality, and level of education; residential segregation, referring to the distribution of the immigrant community throughout the physical area of the host country; language use, including both the loss of the native language and the attainment of the host language, and; intermarriage with members of the host community.[21] Higher levels of occupational diversification and education, geographical distribution, transition to the host language, and intermarriage indicate higher levels of assimilation of the immigrant community.

With respect to family relationships, the assimilationist trend during this period is apparent in the marriage patterns within the community. Although many of the male immigrants who had originally come to Argentina had hoped to return to Lebanon to find a wife, most were not able to do so, causing many members to marry outside of the Lebanese-Argentine community.[22] As a result, the next generation within the community was of both Lebanese and Argentine descent, allowing for "dilution" of their Lebanese ancestry and easier integration into mainstream Argentine culture.

Assimilation also occurred in the context of religion. The original immigrant generation had arrived with a strong sense of religious identity that extended beyond daily religious practices and included institutional and community ties.[23] However, their children, the first generation born in Argentina, were raised in the context of "a society that allowed them educational and economic mobility, but one in which religious faith was strictly confined to the

[21] Mary C. Waters and Tomás R. Jiménez, "Assessing Immigrant Assimilation: New Empirical and Theoretical Challenges," *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 105-125.
[22] Gladys Jozami, "The Return of the 'Turks' in 1990s Argentina," *Patterns of Prejudice* 30, no. 4 (1996): 27-42.
[23] Ibid 34

home environment."[24] While religion continued as a factor in everyday life, it was a private element of everyday life; relationships in the public sphere were generally secular.

Integrated education contributed to the cultural assimilation of the children of immigrants and suggests that integration occurred rapidly. The first generation of immigrants was immediately socialized into Argentine culture through the education system: "The fact that they attended public schools, which was necessary because no ethnically based education was available, contributed to the integration of immigrant children into Argentine society."[25] Lebanese-Argentine students studied in the same schools as the children of the host country and received the same quality of primary education. Within the educational system, children were fully integrated immediately, due to the lack of alternative education options. This academic integration is significant in that the early introduction of children to the norms and traditions of the host culture prepares them to engage with the host culture more fully throughout their adult lives.

Trends in Arabic language use in Argentina also indicate a relatively high level of Lebanese cultural assimilation to Argentine life. Although the initial arrivals to Argentina continued to speak Arabic, "as early as the 1930s, a great number of Christian Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians and Iraqis…stopped using the Arabic language," and, among the Muslim minority, only minimal knowledge of the language was passed on for religious purposes.[26] Spanish rapidly replaced Arabic in the everyday life of the community, demonstrating both the willingness and the ability of the Lebanese community to integrate into Argentine society.

[24] Ibid 36
[25] Jozami, "The Path from Trade to Power," 172.
[26] Jozami, "The Return of the 'Turks'," 34.

From 1920 to 1970, the general trend evident within the Lebanese-Argentine community is one of increasing assimilation. Gladys Jozami goes so far as to argue that, by the 1970s, "this group's religious-cultural profile had seemed to 'disappear,' almost completely assimilating to Argentine society's Western characteristics."[27] The trends in education, language-use, religious practice and marriage, as outlined above, seem to support that claim and indicate a significant level of assimilation.

Crisis Period (1975-1990)

The period ranging from approximately 1975 to 1990 was characterized by political crises in both Argentina and Lebanon. While these events undoubtedly impacted the Lebanese-Argentine diaspora community, there is little scholarship discussing the community during these years of crisis.

The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)

In 1975, long-term tensions between sectarian groups in Lebanon, which had developed over time due to systemically unjust distribution of political and economic power, boiled over into full-fledged civil war. Initially, the conflict primarily involved right-wing Maronite militias against leftist Muslim militias and allies from the Palestine Liberation Organization.[28] In 1976, the Syrian military entered the Lebanese conflict, fighting against leftist and Palestinian militias.[29] In 1978, Israel occupied southern Lebanon. The situation in Lebanon deteriorated rapidly, and Lebanon "became the battle ground for numerous territorial conflicts involving rival

[27] Gladys Jozami, "The Manifestation of Islam in Argentina," *The Americas* 53, no. 1 (1996): 67-85.
[28] As'ad Abukhalil, "Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)," in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa,* ed. Philip Mattar, vol. 3. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 1391-1393.
[29] Fred H. Lawson, "Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, 1976: A Domestic Conflict Explanation," *International Organization* 38, no. 3 (1984): 451-480.

religious militias, ethnic groups, class alliances, political parties and foreign armies, each serving competing local, regional and international interests."[30] In 1982, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon again, leading to the deaths of approximately 20,000 Lebanese and Palestinians.[31] In 1989, Lebanese leaders produced the Ta'if Accords, legally concluding the conflict.[32]

The nature of the Lebanese Civil War led to mass emigration over the course of the 15-year war. Estimates suggest that, over the course of the war, anywhere between 275,000 and one million people left the country in search of safety from the frequent militia clashes that led to massive civilian casualties.[33] The wave of emigrants fleeing the conflict in Lebanon included both Muslims and Christians, most of whom were generally "more educated and more politically vocal than their predecessors."[34] The Lebanese Civil War profoundly shaped the characteristics of the Lebanese diaspora, sending a new wave of immigrants to destinations around the world.

The Last Dictatorship (1976-1983)

During the same period, Argentina experienced its own form of unprecedented violence at the hands of a highly repressive military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1976 to 1983. During the dictatorship's eight-year rule, over 300 clandestine detention centers, or concentration camps, were established throughout the country and approximately 30,000 people were

[30] Chad Elias, "Signs of Conflict: Political Posters of Lebanon's Civil War (1975—1990)," *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no. 1 (2009): 116-120.
[31] Abukhalil, "Lebanese Civil War," 1393.
[32] Ibid, 1393.
[33] Mayssam Ali, "The Road to Recovery: Emigration and the Lebanese Civil War," *Harvard International Review* 17, no. 4 (1995); Maria Koinova, "Can Conflict-Generated Diasporas be Moderate Actors During Episodes of Contested Sovereignty? Lebanese and Albanian Diasporas Compared," *Review of International Studies* 37 (2011): 437-462; Michael Humphrey, "Lebanese Identities: Between Cities, Nations and Trans-Nations," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2004): 31-50.
[34] Humphrey, "Lebanese Identities," 445.

"disappeared"[35] by the state and right-wing paramilitaries.[36] The military dictatorship developed a particular vision of the ideal Argentine citizen that was "apolitical, individualistic, middle class, consumerist and nation-fearing" and all "other" identities were systematically repressed by the state.[37] In 1983, presidential elections were held and Raúl Alfonsín was elected to the presidency, bringing an end to the dictatorship and returning the country to civilian democratic rule.

Immigrant communities were among those targeted by the Argentine military dictatorship. By the time of the dictatorship, the Lebanese-Argentine community was one of the best integrated, most respected, and most wealthy immigrant communities, but they were not safe from the violent repression of the dictatorship.[38] Like all minorities during the dictatorship, the Lebanese-Argentine community had strong incentives to hide their nation of origin.

Resurgence Period (1990-2000s)

In 1989, Carlos Saúl Menem, son of Syrian immigrants to Argentina, was elected president of the nation. Menem renounced the Muslim faith in which he was raised and converted to Catholicism to facilitate his political career.[39] In addition, he cultivated a distinctly Argentine image based in the tradition of the Argentine gaucho. However, his Syrian roots have a significant influence on Argentinians' perceptions of Menem:

[35] The term "disappeared," or "desaparecido" in Spanish, refers to the government tactic of kidnapping "subversive" civilians, torturing them and killing them. The disappeared people were not officially considered prisoners and their deaths were not recognized by the state.
[36] Diego Benegas, "'If There's No Justice…': Trauma and Identity in Post-Dictatorship Argentina," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 16, no. 1 (2011): 20-30.
[37] Humphrey, "Lebanese Identities," 37.
[38] Ibid, 37.
[39] Jozami, "The Path from Trade to Power," 169.

> Somehow the same types of corruption and scandal that have been found among many other world leaders, many of them not Arab but simply creole Latin Americans, become, in the case of the Menems, a transformation of Argentine politics into scenes from *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights.*[40]

Menem's controversial behavior during his presidency was linked to his national identity and Syrian heritage. It is possible that perceptions of Menem as a representative of the Syrian-Lebanese people as a whole may have strongly influenced public perceptions of the entire Arab community in Argentina.

During Menem's presidency, Israeli institutions in Buenos Aires became the targets of terrorist attacks. On March 17, 1992, the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires was bombed, killing twenty-two people. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack, linking it into a series of attacks perpetrated by the terrorist organization in the wake of the Madrid Peace Conference.[41] On July 18, 1994, the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (the Israeli-Argentine Mutual Association) or AMIA building was bombed, killing 85 and injuring around 300. In this second attack, Hezbollah, Iran and Syria were considered the most likely culprits, although the case has yet to be resolved. These attacks, ostensibly products of regional conflict and extreme Islamist attitudes towards the West, undoubtedly influenced the perception of Arabs and Muslims in Argentina.

The political events of the 1990s – the attacks on the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA – drew increased political attention to the Middle East and its people. In the mainstream Argentine

[40] Christina Civantos, Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, Albany, 2006).
[41] Escudé and Gurevich, "Limits to Governability," 128.

media, Middle Eastern affairs became a mainstay as print and broadcast sources increased their coverage of events in the region and its political repercussions in Argentina.[42] Political attention to the Argentine community also increased within the global Arab community. Traditionally, Middle Eastern politicians paid little attention to the Arab communities in Argentina; diplomatic relations between Argentina and Middle Eastern countries were a low priority in both Argentina and the Middle East.[43] However, by the 1990s, Middle Eastern diplomats began to pay more attention to the Arab community in Argentina, perceiving the nation as "full of Arabs," a mischaracterization that indicates a growing importance of the Lebanese-Argentine diaspora from the perspective of international politics.[44] Within Argentine policy, additional political attention was paid to Middle Easterners as, in 1994, Middle Eastern immigrants were labeled as an undesirable population; the Immigration Directorate's Order 280 "instructed those managing all Argentine entry points to exert special controls on all Middle Eastern and/or Muslim arrivals."[45] Through the 1990s, the profile of the Lebanese-Argentine community was increased.

For the generation growing up in the 1990s, the increased public profile of the community may have influenced their own relationships to their Middle Eastern heritage. In the course of my interviews, several young men and women mentioned that they had recently "recovered" their Lebanese-ness. One young woman said, "For years, my family was not in contact with our relatives in Lebanon anymore. Around 2007, we recovered contact and we started, one by one, to get to know the town in Lebanon again and we finished reconstructing the

[42] Jozami, "The Return of the 'Turks'," 38.
[43] Klich, "Argentine-Ottoman Relations," 184.
[44] Jozami, "Manifestation of Islam," 71.
[45] Jozami, "Path from Trade to Power," 174.

family tree."[46] Perhaps this reclamation of Lebanese identity was the result of increased intention to the community during the 1990s. Perhaps the young people growing up in the 1990s felt more free to engage with their "other" identity and express it openly than their parents had felt during the military dictatorship. Whatever the reason, the elevation of the community's public profile was accompanied by a reclamation of the identity among the Lebanese-Argentine youth.[47]

International attention was predominantly focused on political issues in the Middle East and Argentina. However, equal attention was not paid to the other aspects of the community through the 1990s and onwards. It is the intent of this study to fill the gaps in the story of the Lebanese-Argentine community after the 1990s by discussing the familial, religious and cultural identities of the community in the 21st century.

Theoretical Perspectives in Diaspora Studies

Defining Diasporas

The Lebanese-Argentine community of Buenos Aires is best understood in the context of diaspora; the community engages in non-state political activity across national borders and influences the host nation while maintaining a strong connection to its homeland. This definition of a diaspora community will be examined from a theoretical perspective and applied to the Lebanese-Argentine community in this section.

The most basic principle of diaspora is that the community is transnational, or it traverses national boundaries. Essentially, the concept of the "transnational" refers to "human activities and

[46] "durante años mi familia no tuvo más contacto con la familia en Líbano y más o menos, para 2007 recuperamos el contacto y empezamos a volver uno a uno a conocer cual era el pueblo y terminaron de reconstruir el árbol familiar" (JUCAL members, 2013).

[47] Differences between the generations provide another topic for study that is beyond the scope of this study. As the community faced different circumstances during different periods of Argentine history, the different generations likely constructed their identities differently according to the circumstances in which they were raised.

social institutions that extend across national borders."[48] Members of transnational communities are connected to both their country of origin and the host country in which they live. It is this connection to and participation in the affairs of multiple nations that forms the core of every transnational and diaspora community.

This characteristic of diaspora communities is evident in the basic concept of the Lebanese population of Argentina. The members of the community, by definition, traverse political boundaries. They are descendants of Lebanese immigrants who, by choosing to identify as Lebanese, in addition to having an Argentine identity, are demonstrating the very nature of diaspora by maintaining ties to multiple nation-states.

In analyzing diaspora communities, the focus is often on the political participation of diaspora communities in the politics of the country of origin. Participation in home country politics can refer to direct involvement in the political affairs of the home country or to indirect participation by seeking out ways to influence the home country through the politics of the host.[49] The Lebanese-Argentine community's political participation has been evident at different points throughout its history. The earliest arrivals to Argentina participated in the politics of the home country by establishing a local Arabic-language press to discuss Middle Eastern issues and by gathering to celebrate or protest events in the region.[50] The dialogue on the politics of Greater Syria and later Lebanon through the local media demonstrates an active interest and involvement in maintaining a strong connection and commitment to the home region.

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[48] Rainer Baubock, "Towards a Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 700-723.
[49] Wald, "Homeland Interests, Hostland Politics," 273-301.
[50] Hyland, "'Arisen from Deep Slumber'," 560-561.

Diaspora activities are also defined by their influence on the host country. The social, political and cultural identities of diaspora communities influence the host countries in which they are physically situated. This influence is exerted by "the impact of migrants' external political ties on the political institutions of the host country."[51] Whether by formal diplomatic relationships or non-state connections, the interests of diaspora communities are often advocated in the context of the host country.

Early Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and their descendants have been advocating for their community in the Argentine political system using a variety of strategies. Early immigrants petitioned the government to establish diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire.[52] Although the eventual establishment of diplomatic relations did not significantly alter Argentine foreign policy, the effort of the community in securing an official inroad to the Ottoman administration demonstrates the impact of the diaspora identity on the community's political activity.

Finally, one of the most important characteristics of a diaspora community, and that which distinguishes it from other transnational communities, is the core-periphery relationship that exists between the home country and the diaspora communities around the world. A diaspora is defined as having:

> awareness of the spatial distribution of those belonging to the same group of 'us', spread across multiple locations in different states, but with a strong motherland or 'promised land' as a point of shared reference and an 'identity marker.'[53]

[51] Baubock, "Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism," 702.
[52] Klich, "Argentine-Ottoman Relations."
[53] Ludger Pries, "Ambiguities of Global and Transnational Collective Identities," *Global Networks* 13, no. 1 (2013): 22-40.

While both diaspora and transnational communities are characterized by a plurality of geographic areas of influence, Pries explains that the diaspora community has a "centre-periphery" relationship that other transnational communities lack. In the elements of political participation in both the home and host countries, however, the diaspora community closely resembles the transnational community.

The Lebanese-Argentine community exhibits the core-periphery relationship characteristic of diasporas in general. References to the Lebanese diaspora refer to a broader community of people of Lebanese origin spread across many countries, all of which share a common tie to their home country. The one identifying characteristic that unites the community is a shared connection to Lebanon as a distant homeland.

Factors Influencing Diaspora Relations with the Home Country

The extent to which diaspora communities remain connected to their home country varies both between and within communities. Some diaspora actors develop a vibrant, politicized community press or support the political agendas of candidates for office in their home or host countries. Others choose simply to enjoy the traditional food or music of their home country. The following section discusses the factors that scholars suggest influence the extent to which individuals remain connected to their home country.

Over time and across generations, immigrant families tend to gradually integrate more completely into the host culture. The initially strong connection between the immigrant and the home country is not as evident in the original immigrant's children. While the transnational political activity of the original arrivals may still be evident and prevalent among the first

generation born to the host country, over subsequent generations, it will steadily fade out.[54] As younger generations assimilate more completely into the host culture, transnational political activism steadily disappears alongside other defining elements of immigrant communities such as foreign language use and occupation and geographic concentration.

The assimilation of immigrant communities to the host culture and the subsequent loss of a transnationally connected political identity are affected not only by the migrants but also by the host culture. According to Wald, if the characteristics of the immigrants closely match the characteristics of the host culture into which they integrate, the process of assimilation occurs more easily and the transnational political identity is more likely to fade.[55] Among the most influential characteristics of cultural receptivity are religion, language and geographical concentration. Groups that share a religion and language with the host culture and are not concentrated in a specific part of the country are most likely to assimilate effectively to the host culture and weaken their ties to the home culture, including the connection of transnational politics.

In the case of the Lebanese-Argentines, a slightly different trend than that suggested by Wald is evident. Lebanese immigrants to Argentina met with a culture that was significantly unreceptive in terms of religion and language; Maronite and Eastern Orthodox Arabic speakers from Lebanon interacted with Roman Catholic Spanish speakers in Argentina. In addition, the immigrants tended to settle in specific areas of the country and capital city.[56] According to Wald, these characteristics would suggest that the Lebanese immigrants would be particularly resistant to integration and assimilation. However, as discussed above, the Lebanese-Argentine

[54] Baubock, "Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism," 711.
[55] Wald, "Homeland Interests, Hostland Politics," 278.
[56] Hyland, "Arisen from Deep Slumber," 553.

community integrated easily into the developing Argentine culture.[57] This trend suggests that the lack of cultural receptivity in Argentina was not sufficient to prevent integration of the Lebanese-Argentine immigrants.

Another factor that influences the depth of transnational connection is the rationale behind the decision to migrate. While the causes of international migration are numerous, the major distinction between voluntary migration for economic reasons and involuntary migration due to conflict or persecution in the home country establishes two different groups of immigrants with different characteristics. Wald argues that this distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration affects the transnational political identity of immigrant communities: "groups formed by voluntary migration in search of economic opportunity are less likely to develop political ethnic identity than groups who were pushed out of their homeland by political upheaval."[58] Individuals displaced by conflict in the home country are more likely to maintain an active interest in the conflict that forced them to flee the country. Those who voluntarily left their countries of origin may not feel such a need to maintain such a vested interest in the politics of the homeland. In addition, they may come from a country in which politics do not have a significant effect on the everyday life of citizens and therefore do not foster enduring participation.

In this respect, the history of the Lebanese-Argentine community does not necessarily fit with Wald's conclusions. As discussed above, the original wave of migrants, who voluntarily migrated for economic reasons, developed a strong political national identity interested in the

[57] Jozami, "Manifestation of Islam."
[58] Wald, "Homeland Interests, Hostland Politics," 277.

fate of their home region as evidenced by the political press developed in the early 20th century.[59] The early voluntary migrants maintained an active interest in homeland affairs, suggesting that motivations for migration are not a primary factor in determining political activity.

In communities with a low level of transnational political involvement for reasons of time, lack of receptivity of the host culture or voluntary migration, revitalization of the transnational identity can sometimes occur. If an event of political significance occurs in the home country, transnational politics "can sometimes even be reactivated among groups that originally emigrated as labor migrants" or otherwise saw a decline of the transnational identity.[60] In such cases, a political shock in the home country can draw the community's attention to the political conditions in the home country and create a renewed participation in the politics of the home country.

[59] Hyland, "Arisen from Deep Slumber," 560-561
[60] Baubock, "Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism," 711.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Study Design

In order to address the construction of a Lebanese identity among the Lebanese community in Buenos Aires, it is essential to understand how members of that community self-identify. As such, the primary sources of information for analysis are formal and informal interviews with members of Buenos Aires's Lebanese community, supplemented by observations. A total of five formal interviews were conducted: three with individuals, one with eight members of a Lebanese youth group and one with a representative of an Arab-Argentine institution.[1] Observations and informal conversations took place during a Lebanese youth group meeting and a two-day visit to the home of a Lebanese family.

The subject of identity construction is an inherently personal and individual topic. While academic studies and historical context are essential in establishing contextual information, personal testimonies and explanations of individual identity must be the fundamental bases of any discussion of identity. Personal interviews, thus, provide the best insights into the process of identity construction. In personal interviews, complex conceptions of identity become evident that would not otherwise appear in outsiders' descriptions. The ways in which individuals choose to describe themselves are an integral component of personal identity that cannot be understood without speaking directly to the individuals themselves. Informal observations are also important because they provide evidence of the various manifestations of identity in everyday life. The combination of self-identification through interviews and third-party observations allow for a

[1] For a complete list of interviews conducted, see Appendix 2

more holistic understanding of individual identity constructions among members of the broader Lebanese-Argentine community.

Interviewees were encouraged to reflect openly on their identity in response to a series of open-ended questions. The interview framework[2] included three primary themes: the migratory history of the interviewee's family and their connection to Lebanon, the interviewee's perspective on political events in the Middle East and, the interviewee's self-identification and understanding of the Lebanese identity. Each theme contributes to the understanding of identity construction.

Family Migratory History and Connection to Lebanon

Discussing the migratory history of each interviewee's family establishes the historical and biological connection between the interviewee and Lebanon. Each interviewee has a familial connection to Lebanon that has been shaped by processes of assimilation and interactions with Argentine culture. In order to understand the effects of assimilation and diaspora cultures, it is necessary to understand exactly how the subjects have interacted with Argentine culture and with Lebanon, an understanding that can only be developed by discussing the subject's family history.

Interaction with the country of origin is an equally important factor in the construction of a transnational identity. Members of a diaspora community have an inherent relationship with two separate nations and cultures, and the manner in which they interact with their country of origin can shape their identities. Interaction with the home culture can take a variety of forms: through travel, food, dance, music, news, religious practice, political interest or involvement, to name a few. These interactions with the country of origin can be seen as concrete manifestations

[2] See Appendix 1

of a transnational Lebanese identity among individuals residing in Buenos Aires. The elements that are emphasized in their interactions with Lebanon reflect the components of the Lebanese identity that figure most prominently in their identity constructs.

Perspective on Middle Eastern Politics

The questions about Middle Eastern politics are intended to evaluate the extent to which politics are a factor in identity construction. Interviewees were asked to offer opinions on politics and conflict in the Middle East and to discuss the impact of Middle Eastern politics on their lives in Argentina. While politics are only one factor among the many that play into identity construction, the topic can be controversial and may not come up in conversation without adequate prompting.

Self-Identification

As previously established, the interviewees' self-identification is an absolutely essential factor in a complete understanding of identity construction. The questions on this topic are thus intended to be open-ended, giving interviewees the opportunity to freely define their own identities and explain the expressions of their identities in their everyday lives. In addition, interviewees are asked to discuss instances when they may have felt more or less connected to certain components of their identity. The purpose of these questions is to establish a dynamic understanding of the processes that shape and change identities.

Information Access

Information access plays a crucial role in the scope and execution of this study. The Lebanese community in Argentina is typically a closed, private community. Establishing contacts within the community and building the trust necessary to discuss personal topics with

members of the community can be a challenge. Even with the contacts I established through personal connections, access to interviews was limited. In several cases, there was nobody at the sites of Arab-Argentine organizations and phone calls were not answered. On other visits, potential subjects chose not to participate.

When subjects did agree to participate, they were not always forthcoming with their responses. The majority was hesitant to discuss politics. They would frequently qualify their comments, clarifying that they were only opinions or that they did not know much about the situation. In one case, an interviewee claimed that she did not know enough about Middle Eastern politics to offer an opinion. In other cases, interviewees insisted that they had no connection whatsoever with Middle Eastern politics.

There are various possible explanations of the Lebanese-Argentine's reluctance to discuss politics. First of all, it is entirely possible that their connection with Lebanon is exactly as they described it: completely devoid of any political component. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that they choose not to follow the news about Middle Eastern politics and do not have a strong relationship with the region's politics. However, it is also possible that the reluctance to discuss politics may be an issue of a lack of trust**.** In today's world, there are significant prejudices towards and harmful stereotypes of Arabs and others from the Middle East. It is, therefore, reasonable that a Lebanese-Argentine may not wish to discuss potentially controversial and divisive political issues with a stranger; any information given could potentially be used to publicly misrepresent people of Middle Eastern descent.

The complex relationship between the United States and the Middle East is another possible source of access problems. The United States' role in the Middle East is complicated and controversial, not only in the United States but also around the world, and the issue can

strike particularly close to home for some individuals of Middle Eastern descent. The United States' alliance with Israel has had a significant influence on Middle Eastern politics and can sometimes be construed as an anti-Arab policy. This political situation could generate distrust of the United States among Arab-descended individuals and influence the decision to participate in a study directed by a U.S. citizen like myself.

The implications of the challenges of information access are two-fold; they (1) limit the scope of the investigation and (2) influence the interview analysis.

The scope of the study is limited by the fact that conclusions are drawn solely on the basis of five interviews. Realistically, the conclusions cannot critique the construction of the Lebanese identity within the Lebanese-Argentine community as a whole. However, because of the highly individual nature of identity construction, such generalized conclusions can never truly be accurate. The object of this study is not to comment on the Lebanese-Argentine community as a whole, but rather to examine the processes that influence the identity construction of a small group of Lebanese-Argentines as a means of bringing to light some of the complexities inherent in these processes.

Reluctance to discuss politics has a more significant impact on the study's conclusions. Political interests can be a significant factor in the development of personal and transnational identities. As such, the extent to which interviewees consider politics a component of their Lebanese identity is an essential part of the overall analysis. Any hesitation to discuss politics – for any reason – could lead interviewees to downplay the role of politics in their lives, thus influencing the overall analysis of the different factors of identity formation. This consideration must be taken into account within the analysis of the interviews and in drawing conclusions based on the interviewees' responses.

Interviews

The interviewees represent different generations of Lebanese descent, from immigrants to immigrants' great-grandchildren. They participate in different institutions and practice different religions. The following information includes background on each of the interviewees and their connections to Lebanon.

Majida G.

Majida G. is a 45-year-old Lebanese, Druze woman who was born and raised in Lebanon. In 1992, she met and married her husband, Sharif, a Lebanese dentist who, at that time, had been living in Argentina for five years. Sharif had returned to Lebanon to find a wife, and once they had married, Sharif and Majida traveled to Argentina to begin their life together. Majida has spent the last 21 years in Argentina, raising her three daughters, studying computer science and cosmetology, and working as a bilingual executive secretary. She also has been casually involved in a variety of Lebanese cultural institutions in Buenos Aires, including the Lebanese Club, where I first met her, and the Druze Charitable Association, the principal organization of the Druze religious community in Buenos Aires.

Majida's familial connections to Lebanon are still important today; her mother, three sisters and brother all still live in Lebanon, as well as Sharif's three siblings. During her 21 years in Argentina, she has traveled back to Lebanon to visit five times. Her contact and communication with her family members in Lebanon help maintain a strongly present link to her home country.

Carla E.

In the course of my visits with Majida and her family, I had the opportunity to speak informally with Majida's daughter Carla. These conversations and Majida's comments on her daughters during our interview provide basic information on Carla's relationship with her Lebanese heritage.

Carla, at age 21, is Majida and Sharif's oldest daughter. She was born in Argentina and has lived in Buenos Aires her entire life. Her relationship to Lebanon is, again, through her parents and their family members in Lebanon. In addition, she has other connections to Lebanon and the broader Middle Eastern region through her friends, many of whom are of Lebanese or Syrian descent. Carla and her younger sisters also all speak Arabic and thus are able to follow Lebanese pop culture and engage in the region in other ways.

José S.

José, now approximately 50 years old, is both a child and a grandchild of immigrants; his father immigrated to Argentina from Lebanon in 1930 and his maternal grandparents arrived with their families as youths in the opening decades of the 20th century. According to José, his maternal grandparents' families left Lebanon to avoid potential persecution by the Ottoman Turks. His grandparents met and married in Argentina, raised 7 children and supported themselves by working in commerce. José's father, on the other hand, immigrated as a refugee of the eventual trouble that earlier generations had feared. José's paternal grandparents were killed during the turmoil and famine in the Mount Lebanon region during World War I. José's father left the country in 1930 to join his cousins who had previously immigrated to Brazil. However, José's father and his cousins were eventually deported to Argentina to take a ship back to

Lebanon. While he was waiting to leave, a Lebanese immigrant family originally from his parents' village in Lebanon heard his story and took him under their protection; that family was José's mother's family.

José's own relationship with Lebanon is primarily through the church. A practicing Maronite Catholic, José is active in the Maronite community in Buenos Aires. He also has connections with family members in Lebanon; his oldest brother returned to Lebanon and raised his family there. As a result, he is familiar with Lebanon and with the Middle East as a region, having traveled throughout Lebanon and in Syria, Kuwait, and Jordan. In conversation, his familiarity with the history of the region was readily apparent in his opinions on historical and current events.

Pablo A. and JUCAL

The Lebanese Club where I met Majida is also the institutional home of the Argentine-Lebanese Cultural Union youth group (Juventud de la Unión Cultural Argentino Libanesa – JUCAL). One evening, I conducted a group interview with eight members of JUCAL and an individual interview with another member, Pablo A. The group members, all of whom were in their early 20s, were primarily the great-grandchildren of Lebanese immigrants, although some were grandchildren of Lebanese-born individuals that immigrated with their families at a young age. Most of the JUCAL members said that their great-grandparents had traveled to Argentina in the years immediately preceding World War I, and, generally speaking, almost all mentioned family members still living in Lebanon.

Pablo's situation is unique among the interviewees in that he explicitly explains that he only has Lebanese heritage on his mother's side of the family; his father's side of the family is of

Swedish descent. On his mother's side, Pablo is a great-grandson of immigrants. His great-grandparents both immigrated to Argentina at the beginning of the 20th century to escape the conflict in Lebanon in the 1920s and 30s. Some of their family members stayed in Lebanon, and Pablo has relatives on his great-grandmother's side in Baalbek and Beirut. However, having never traveled to Lebanon, Pablo has never met his relatives that still live in Lebanon. For Pablo, and for some of the other JUCAL members, the connection to Lebanon is indirect and independent of any personal familiarity with their ancestors' country.

Adalberto Assad

The final interview functions not as a personal testimony, but rather as a broader perspective on the collective experience of the Arab-Argentine community, particularly with regards to the community's relationship to Middle Eastern politics. As such, the questions asked of Adalberto Assad, the president of FEARAB Argentina (Confederación de Entidades Argentino Árabes – the Confederation of Argentine-Arab Organizations), focus more on the effects of Middle Eastern politics on the Argentine-Arab community than on personal identification and family history.

FEARAB is a non-governmental, non-political institution that provides an overarching structure for the formal organization of the institutional expression of Arab culture in Argentina. The organization states its purpose is to serve as an institution that "represents the Argentine-Arab organizations, institutions, clubs, civil associations, mutual aide societies and charitable organizations, forming an organic, systematic, nationwide structure that represents the entire

Argentine-Arab collective"[3]. While Assad's perspective is neither inherently Lebanese nor inherently political, his contact and deep level of involvement within the Arab-Argentine community make him uniquely qualified among the interviewees to provide a more global perspective on Arab-Argentines' relationships to their home countries. This perspective supplements the more personal and individual accounts by commenting on political issues that were not openly discussed in the individual interviews, such as the more politically controversial issues surrounding Middle Eastern conflict and the attacks in Buenos Aires.

[3] "representa a entidades, instituciones, clubes, asociaciones civiles, de socorros mutuos y de beneficencia argentino árabes, conformando una estructura orgánica, sistemática y de alcance nacional que representa a toda la Colectividad Argentino-Árabe" "Objetivos y Estructura" FEARAB Argentina. www.fearab.org.ar

Chapter Four: The Lebanese-Argentine Diaspora Today

The Lebanese diaspora has historically led to the creation of Lebanese communities in countries around the world. In addition to Argentina, Lebanese immigrants left their homes and headed for Brazil, the United States, West Africa, and Australia and other nations around the world.[1] The following chapter will discuss the various ways in which Lebanese diaspora communities construct their Lebanese identity. The four majors areas of consideration are: familial connections; religious practice and community; political participation; and reconstruction of Lebanese culture in the host community.

For the members of the Lebanese-Argentine community that I interviewed, these factors were all evident in their understanding of their Lebanese identity and their relationship with Lebanon. The following discussion will consider the comments of Majida, Pablo, José, Adalberto Assad and the youths of JUCAL in the broader context of the Lebanese diaspora, focusing on the four aforementioned themes: family, politics, religion, and cultural reconstruction.

Family Connections in the Lebanese Diaspora

Family connections are one of the most prominent factors in analyses of the Lebanese diaspora.[2] The following section considers family relationships in terms of intermarriage and direct links to family members still living in Lebanon, as well as influence of family relationships on political activity.

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[1] Koinova, "Conflict-generated diasporas," 437-462.
[2] Daiva Stasiulis and Zainab Amery, "Securitizing Dual Citizenship: The Emotional Cartography of Citizenship among Lebanese-Australians and Lebanese-Canadians following the Summer 2006 War," *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora,* ed. Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss and Paul Tabar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 69-103

For the members of the Argentine-Lebanese community, family connections play an important role in the construction and maintenance of the Lebanese identity. Majida explained how her family ties serve as an access point for information about Lebanese affairs and discussed the importance of marriage and family in cultural maintenance. Pablo's family initially provided the motivation to explore his Lebanese identity. José and Majida both included family history as an important factor in the community's political engagement.

Family ties serve as one of the basic linkages connecting the Lebanese community in Argentina to Lebanon. For direct immigrants like Majida, who communicates on a daily basis with her family members still living in Lebanon, the connection is tangible and overt; maintaining a close connection with family in Lebanon allows Majida to engage directly with Lebanon and her own Lebanese identity on a day-to-day basis. For the members of younger generations — many of whom have never traveled to Lebanon and are not in contact with family members in Lebanon — their Lebanese identity is fundamentally constructed based on an abstract conceptualization of an imagined Lebanese family identity. One young woman involved in JUCAL described her understanding of her family's identity this way: "…you integrate automatically. You assume this Lebanese identity that your family had. I've never been to Lebanon, but I've been involved in [JUCAL] for 7 years. You have to love something you don't know. That's part of the Lebanese identity."[3] She had no direct relationship to Lebanon, having never visited the country. Her Lebanese identity was based not on experience with Lebanon or a sense of belonging to a global Lebanese community, but rather based on her understanding of her

[3] "…integras como automáticamente. Asumís esta identidad libanesa que tenía la familia. Yo no conozco el Líbano, sin embargo, hace siete años que estoy integrada con esta organización. Sin embargo, tenés que amar a algo que no conoces y eso es parte de la identidad libanesa." (JUCAL 2013)

collective family identity. Being Lebanese, in her mind was primarily determined by having familial ties to Lebanon.

For Pablo, another young person without direct connections to individuals still living in Lebanon, family ties still play strongly into his construction of his Lebanese identity. Pablo has family members living in Baalbek and Beirut, but he has never met them, having never traveled to Lebanon. However, his interest in engaging with his Lebanese heritage developed directly due to a sense of responsibility to his great-grandmother who immigrated to Argentina from Lebanon:

> I joined [JUCAL] to show my great-grandmother, in some way, that not everything she brought to Argentina has been lost. The generations go by and things are lost. Only a few things remain here and there. But I want to show myself and, more than anything, show her that coming here was not in vain and that it has not been lost in her family.[4]

Pablo made a conscious choice to engage with his Lebanese heritage by participating in JUCAL, and a sense a responsibility to his family played an influential role in shaping that decision. Pablo's decision demonstrates the central importance of family ties in the choice to recognize and engage with his Lebanese heritage. Although the connection is not necessarily with individuals living in Lebanon, a familial connection still plays a central role in Pablo's relationship with Lebanon and his Lebanese identity.

In Pablo, Majida and the JUCAL members' discussions of their family relationships, family is a core principle in their definitions of "Lebanon" and "Lebanese." The connection is

[4] "Entré por el tema de para mostrarle de alguna manera a mi bisabuela que no se perdió, digamos, lo que ella trajo a la Argentina…va pasando las generaciones y va perdiendo, solo va quedando algunos y otras cosas. Pero es para mostrar a mí y mostrar, más que todo, a ella que no fue en vano venir acá y en su familia no se perdió" (Pablo A. 2013)

direct in Majida's case. However, young peoples' familial connections to Lebanon suggest another possible way of relating to Lebanon through an abstract conception of heritage rather than through connections to specific individuals. This may be the case in Pablo's family, and in Argentina more generally, because of the long history of immigration from Lebanon to Argentina; the majority of the migration to Argentina occurred in the early 20th century and, with time, as Pablo stated, direct connections with Lebanon are lost. Yet Pablo — and the other Lebanese descendants interviewed — is familiar with his family history and feels a sense of obligation to his ancestors. The strength of this abstract, historical conception of family in influencing Lebanese-Argentines' relationships with Lebanon provides additional evidence of the importance of family ties in maintaining the relationship with Lebanon.

This conceptualization of the family as the core unit of the transnational community is not unique to the Lebanese community in Argentina. A similar trend, dubbed a "relational model of nationality and citizenship" was observed by Daiva Stasiulis and Zainab Amery in their studies of Lebanese communities in Australia.[5] According to this model, Lebanese citizens with dual Australian and Lebanese citizenship understand their two citizenships differently. While the Australian citizenship is seen as representative of legal rights and protections, the Lebanese citizenship carries intangible meaning and represents the emotional ties back to Lebanon and Lebanese family members. For these Lebanese-Australians, family connections form the basis of their understanding of their own Lebanese-ness, just as in the Argentine case.

Marriage within the Lebanese community and the construction of a Lebanese family outside of Lebanon also demonstrate the important role of family in the definition, understanding and maintenance of immigrants' Lebanese identity. In her interview, Majida emphasized the

[5] Stasiulis and Amery, "Securitizing Dual Citizenship," 69-103.

importance of marrying a member of the Lebanese community in order to preserve immigrant families' Lebanese cultures and identities. This emphasis suggests that marriage and family identity play a fundamental role in constructing and maintaining individuals' Lebanese identity despite geographical and generational distance from roots in Lebanon.

Majida's personal history provides evidence of the importance of building a Lebanese family in 21st century Argentina. Majida's husband, Sharif, returned to Lebanon from Argentina in order to find a Lebanese wife: "First my husband was here...He was here in Argentina for five years and then he left for Lebanon. And we met there in '92. In 18 days we were married and I came back with him."[6] Nuclear family relationships defined both Majida and Sharif's constructions of their identities. Sharif solidified and strengthened his connection to his own Lebanese identity by making an effort to build a Lebanese family in Argentina. At the same time, Majida had to reconstruct her identity, adding an Argentine element and finding new ways to remain connected to Lebanon while living outside the country. In both cases, family takes a central role in defining the nature of each individual's relationship to Lebanon.

Marriage and nuclear family are crucial in maintaining a connection to the country of origin despite time and processes of assimilation. Majida, in discussing her hopes for her daughters' futures, speaks of the marriage and Lebanese identity as closely intertwined concepts:

> In general, here in Argentina, time passes and customs are lost and identities are lost. And that's what I teach my daughters: not to lose their customs and not to lose their identity, to look, in their futures, to marry someone who is not Argentine, who is Lebanese and

[6] "Primero estaba mi marido acá…Estuvo cinco años acá en Argentina y se fue a Líbano y allí nos conocimos. En '92 nos conocimos. En 18 días nos casamos y vine con él…" (Majida G. 2013)

> who is of their religion, if possible, in order to conserve the culture, to conserve their roots, to conserve many things.[7]

In Majida's understanding, marriage to a Lebanese man of the same faith is of the utmost importance for the maintenance of her daughters' Lebanese identities. While she does mention other important elements, like language, the majority of her discussion of identity conservation is framed in the context of marriage and family. The impact of family life on identity construction is fundamentally important and concern over the preservation of the Lebanese identity in diaspora is evident in the focus on marrying within the culture.

The emphasis on marrying within cultural and religious groups appeared not only in Majida's hopes for her daughters' futures but also in the present romantic preoccupations her daughter Carla. Despite the generational difference and the girls' level of assimilation into Argentine society, Carla considered dating a complicated topic. Just as her parents hoped she would, Carla wanted to marry a Lebanese Druze man. However, because the Druze community in Argentina is relatively small, Carla feared that ultimately she would have to travel to Lebanon in order to find a husband.[8] The emphasis on marrying within one's religious and cultural traditions persists despite the generational differences and Carla's blended Lebanese-Argentine identity.

The importance of marriage in strengthening familial connections with Lebanese individuals in order to preserve a strong Lebanese cultural identity is not unique to the Argentine diaspora community. In the early waves of migration to the United States, Lebanese men often

[7] "En general acá en la Argentina, si, pasa el tiempo y se van perdiendo las costumbres y se van perdiendo identidades. Y eso es lo que yo enseño a mis hijas que no pierden estas costumbres y no pierden su identidad: que busquen en el futuro de ellas para casarse que no sea argentino, que sea libanés y sea de su religión si es posible para conservar la cultura, para conservar las raíces, para conservar muchas cosas." (Majida G. 2013)
[8] Carla E. 2013

traveled without family members; in 1900, about one-third of immigrants from Greater Syria to the United States were women.[9] While some women, especially widows, did emigrate alone or with their children, it was not uncommon for Lebanese men who had immigrated to the United States alone to bring their wives over from Lebanon, return to Lebanon to look for a wife or marry within the Lebanese-American immigrant community.[10] A similar trend was evident among Lebanese immigrants to Senegal as young men returned to Lebanon to find a wife in their home villages in the southern part of the country, and it was not uncommon for an engagement to be celebrated twice: in the bride's village in Lebanon and in the husband's new home in Dakar.[11] Majida and Sharif's experiences and Carla's situation fit within this broader trend in which marriage serves as an important element in the construction of new, stronger links to Lebanon.

However, it is also possible that religion plays a more significant role in marriage decisions than simply the desire to maintain one's Lebanese-ness. Among the Lebanese Christians interviewed, cultural blending in marriage was relatively common: Pablo's Lebanese mother married his Swedish father, the grandmother of one JUCAL member immigrated with her family to find work and met her husband in Argentina, the grandfathers of other JUCAL members immigrated alone and married Argentine women.[12] The tendency to emigrate alone and later return to Lebanon to find a wife is more prevalent among Druze immigrants to the U.S.[13] and the immigrants to Senegal, the majority of whom were Shi'a Muslims from Southern

[9] Gualtieri, "Gendering the Chain Migration Thesis," 67-78
[10] Nelia Hyndman-Rizik, "On Being Honkey – The Inter-Racial and Inter-Cultural Experience of 3rd and 4th Generation Lebanese Americans," *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora,* ed. Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss and Paul Tabar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 2-21.
[11] Max Weiss, "'Don't Throw Yourself Away to the Dark Continent': Shi'i Migration to West Africa and the Hierarchies of Exclusion in Lebanese Culture," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism,* 7.1 (2007): 46-58; Mara A. Leichtman, **"**From the Cross (and Crescent) to the Cedar and Back Again: Transnational Religion and Politics Among Lebanese Christians in Senegal,**"** *Anthropological Quarterly,* 86.1 (2013): 35-75.
[12] Pablo A., 2013; JUCAL members, 2013
[13] Gualtieri, "Gendering the Chain Migration Thesis," 72.

Lebanon.[14] This distinction between religious groups complicates the marriage trends within the Lebanese disapora. However, the experiences of Majida's family still fit within the trends evident in the diaspora community; like the Druze immigrants to the United States, Majida's family considers marriage to be an important step in the construction and maintenance of their Lebanese identities.

Not only do family ties influence the ways in which individuals understand their own relationships to Lebanon, but they also inform the ways in which individuals in diaspora understand Lebanese politics and current affairs. The impact of family on diaspora identities goes beyond constructions of nationality and perspectives on marriage to shape immigrants' transnational political identities as well.

As a direct immigrant from Lebanon, Majida maintains close relationships with many family members still living in Lebanon, helping her remain connected to her country of origin and contributing to her understanding of current events in Lebanon. Majida's mother, four siblings, and three of her husband, Sharif's, siblings still live in Lebanon. Majida's family in Argentina stays in close contact with her relatives in Lebanon: "We watch the daily news from over there every night. The news is happening there and I'm watching it here. That's how we communicate and know what's happening and what the situation is like. And we talk with our family there almost every day."[15] Majida's familial connections are a fundamental part of her day-to-day life and they serve as a vital point of access to information about Lebanon. Frequent conversations with her family members serve as a source of news on par with watching the daily

[14] Leichtman, "From the Cross," 38.
[15] "Todas las noches vemos las noticias de día allá del momento. Ellas están pasando las noticias allá y yo las estoy viendo acá. Es la manera de comunicarnos, saber qué está pasando allá y la situación. Y hablamos con la familia allá casi todos los días." (Majida G., 2013)

news direct from Lebanon. Family ties help Majida to understand what is happening in Lebanon and construct her own understanding of today's Lebanon.

Without close contact with her family and the direct access to on-the-ground information that they provide, Majida would receive different information about current events in Lebanon and understand the current state of Lebanon differently than she does. Argentine news coverage of events in Lebanon portrays the situation in a dramatic fashion that does not reflect the experiences of ordinary people living in Lebanon: "[My family says] that there's nothing going on in Lebanon. Everything's okay…the news that reaches us here is very, very – what do you call it? – Huge, very blown up."[16] For Majida, conventional news coverage limits access to information about Lebanon to only major international affairs concerns that are sufficiently dramatic to warrant coverage on the international news wires. The conventional news media only provides enough information for a basic – and often dramatized – understanding of Lebanese affairs. Family connections enable members of the diaspora community to access additional information that serves as the foundation for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Lebanon and a stronger connection to the affairs of the home country.

However, in addition to family ties, technology allows Majida and the rest of the Lebanese-Argentine community to access a wider range of information about current affairs in Lebanon. In describing her access to information about Lebanon, Majida mentioned various internet and television devices that allow her to watch the Lebanese television news on her own television in Buenos Aires. In theory, the JUCAL members similarly have access to the same Lebanese news sources and on-the-ground reports via internet sources; in fact, they do regularly

[16] "Ellos dicen que no hay nada en Líbano. Está todo bien…las noticias llegan acá muy, muy - ¿Cómo se llama? – muy grande, muy inflamadas." (Majida G., 2013)

follow the news on Lebanon online.[17] However, because the majority does not speak Arabic and they mostly are not in contact with family members in Lebanon, in practice, their access to information is limited to the dramatic stories published in the Spanish-language news outlets. The result is that they "understand [Middle Eastern affairs] like any other Argentine citizen"[18] and lack the additional perspectives that Majida receives via the combination of high-tech access to Lebanese news and personal contacts with family members in Lebanon.

In addition to shaping how Lebanese-Argentines understand Lebanese politics, family ties also influence how much individuals are concerned with the politics of their home countries. Concern for family members in the Middle East contributes to an enhanced interest in political affairs among members of the diaspora communities. Majida discussed Middle Eastern politics in the context of the Syrian conflict and its impact on people of Middle Eastern origin living in Argentina, saying, "What I do see in the Syrian community today is that, yes, they are worried about what is going to happen in Syria because many people are dying, many relatives, and there are many people that are homeless now."[19] Although Majida refers primarily to Syrians living in Argentina, her comments explain how politics could manifest themselves in the Lebanese community were the situation in Lebanon different. The implication is that Lebanese-Argentines are not as concerned with Middle Eastern affairs as Syrian-Argentines because political affairs in the region are not directly affecting their families to the same extent. Should the conflict in Syria spill over into Lebanon, perhaps familial ties would motivate a new level of political interest and concern that is not at present evident in the Argentine-Lebanese community. Familial ties thus shape the transnational political identities of the Lebanese diaspora community in Argentina.

[17] JUCAL members, 2013
[18] "Nos enteramos como cualquier ciudadano de este país." (JUCAL members, 2013)
[19] "Lo que sí veo en la comunidad siria hoy en día es que sí, viven preocupados por lo que va a pasar allá en Siria porque está muriendo mucha gente, muchos parientes, mucha gente que ya no tiene su casa." (Majida G., 2013)

Finally, family ties can also impact the ways in which individuals in diaspora engage in politics. According to José, his personal family history was a significant factor in determining his political identity and his engagement with Argentine politics: "When I started to vote, my father tyrannically made us vote for the White Party…So, one day, I asked my father: 'Dad, why do you make us vote for the White Party?' 'Thanks to them,' he said, 'your dad has your mom.'"[20] A member of the White Party had been in power in Tucumán and had defended the rights of Lebanese immigrants, allowing José's mother, among many other immigrants, to enter the country. José's family experiences directly shaped his own and his family's participation in the Argentine political system. Part of his Lebanese identity included this particular political behavior.

The importance of family ties as a factor shaping immigrants' transnational political identity is, again, not unique to the Lebanese-Argentine community. However, the ways in which family ties influence political identities and activities vary based on the context. For Argentina's Lebanese community, family connections shape political opinions, provide access to political information and encourage particular patterns of participation in Argentine politics. Among the Senegalese community, however, the impact of family on politics was manifested differently. In the mid-20th century, Lebanese descendants living in Dakar were heavily involved in the politics of Greater Syria, providing financial and intellectual support for political groups in their home country and particularly in the region of Jabal 'Amil from which they had emigrated.[21] Connections with politically active family and friends in Jabal 'Amil both encouraged and

[20] "Cuando empiezo a votar, mi padre nos obligaba tiránicamente que votemos por el Partido Blanco…Entonces, un día pregunté a mi padre: 'papá, cómo nos obligas a votar por Partido Blanco?'… 'Gracias a ellos, tu padre tiene tu mamá'" (José S. 2013)

[21] Andrew Arsan, "The Ties that Bind: The Political Sentiments of Shi'a Migrants in Senegal, 1919-1960," *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora,* ed. Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss and Paul Tabar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 278-293.

facilitated political activity among the immigrant community living in Senegal, allowing Lebanese individuals in diaspora to participate directly in the politics of their home country. The primary difference between the Senegalese case and the Argentine case is the type of impact that family ties have on politics. For the Argentine community — many young members of which are disconnected from family in Lebanon and relatively uninformed about Lebanese politics — family ties shape information access and, to some extent, political participation in Argentine politics. Direct participation in Lebanese politics, like among the Senegalese community, is not apparent. What both communities do have in common, however, is a strong influence of family ties on political identities.

Ultimately, it is evident that family history and present-day family ties play a significant role in Lebanese-Argentine individuals' understanding of their own Lebanese-ness. Whether by motivating a young man to learn more about his Lebanese heritage, or by encouraging a young woman to marry a Lebanese husband in order to preserve her culture, or by shaping transnational political identities and behaviors, family plays an irrefutable role in the construction of Lebanese diaspora identities.

Political Identities and Participation

While José's experience voting for the White Party out of a sense of familial obligation provides one notable exception, in general, the Lebanese-Argentines do not define their relationship to Lebanon in political terms. More often than not, they expressed disinterest and disengagement from Lebanese politics.

Even Majida, who regularly interacts with individuals from a variety of social groups and sectors within the Lebanese-Argentine community, reports a lack of concern for Lebanese

politics among the community in Argentina. For those who do exhibit an interest, Lebanese politics are not a priority:

> In general, most people don't worry about what is happening in Lebanon…Including the Lebanese people because they aren't living there. They want the situation to be okay so they can go and travel there, but 'how is Lebanon?' isn't the biggest concern of people here.[22]

What Majida observes is that politics are not a central concern for Lebanese-Argentine individuals. While they may occasionally be relevant for individuals planning a vacation or worrying about their family members in the country, politics are not a major component of their relationship to Lebanon. Their Lebanese identity is not directly tied to Lebanese political events or positions.

Among the youth, even those who actively engage with their Lebanese identities by participating in organizations like JUCAL, politics are absent from their knowledge about Lebanon and from their conceptualizations of their Lebanese identities. When asked about Middle Eastern politics and current events, several JUCAL members stated that they simply did not know enough about politics in the Middle East to be able to offer an opinion.[23] The young people involved in JUCAL identify as Lebanese to such an extent that they actively seek out additional information about their heritage and culture; that much is evident in their participation in the organization. However, the fact that they are uninformed about the political situation in

[22] "En general lo que está pasando en Líbano muchos no se preocupa…Incluso la gente libanesa porque no están viviendo allá. Quieren que la situación esté bien para que puedan ir y viajar por allá. Pero no es la mayor preocupación de la gente acá: 'Cómo está Líbano?'" (Majida G., 2013)
[23] JUCAL members, 2013

Lebanon suggests that they do not consider politics to be an essential component of their Lebanese identities.

Beyond being simply unaware of political circumstances in Lebanon, some of the young people actively disassociated their Lebanese identity from Lebanese politics. They argued that their Lebanese heritage in no way shapes their perspective on Middle Eastern affairs and politics. One JUCAL member made a point of saying, "We're not politically organized around the conflicts that are going on in Syria and all around Lebanon."[24] Other JUCAL members expressed similar sentiments. This active denial of any connection suggests that the young Lebanese-Argentines do not consider politics to be a factor in their Lebanese identity. To the contrary, they appear to actively identify as a-political. The organization of JUCAL as an a-political, a-religious, cultural institution supports this tendency among the youth to deny political identification.

The lack of politicization and activism of the JUCAL youth is reflected also in statements from the president of FEARAB Argentina (Confederación de Entidades Argentino Arabes — Federation of Argentine-Arab Organizations) and in the official platform of the organization. FEARAB, an umbrella organization representing the interests of a wide variety of Arab-Argentine organizations with various missions, officially characterizes itself as an organization working "in favor of the Argentine-Arab collective and its cultural identity without distinguishing between people on the basis of political, confessional, racial or national

[24] "No estamos formados políticamente o con lo que tiene que ver con los conflictos que están ocurriendo en Siria o en los alrededores de Líbano." (JUCAL members, 2013).

affiliation."[25] The explicit focus on a cultural Arab-Argentine identity as a priority over political, religious or national identity hints at dissociation from Middle Eastern politics within the Argentine diaspora communities. However, as an umbrella organization, FEARAB may simply reject conflictive and divisive political and religious ideologies in favor of a more unifying cultural identity.

However, the president of FEARAB, Adalberto Assad, in his interview, also articulated an active anti-political agenda, suggesting that the de-emphasis of political identity is a deeply rooted ideological position held by the organization. Assad stated, "the philosophy of FEARAB Argentina is to firmly and forcefully prevent people from importing foreign conflicts, especially conflicts from the Arab world, into the feelings and the idiosyncrasy of the Argentine people."[26] Again, active opposition to the extension of Middle Eastern political identities in the diaspora community appears as an explicit component of an institutional platform. The suggestion is, thus, that Lebanese-Argentine institutional life is organized around cultural and religious identities rather than political identities.

This trend within the Lebanese-Argentine community contradicts general trends of political activism in Middle Eastern diaspora. Because members of Middle Eastern diaspora live in circumstances distant from their home countries in both time and physical space, they invent an "idealized common identity altogether rooted in romanticized past and projected in dazzling future" and, because they discount the "daily accommodation experienced by their fellow

[25] "a pro de la Colectividad Argentino-Arabe y de su identidad cultural sin realizar distinción alguna de order político, confesional, racial o de nacionalidad." FEARAB Argentina. "Objetivos y Estructura"< www.fearab.org.ar/fearab_objetivos_y_estructura.php> Accessed February 17, 2014.
[26] "el pensamiento de FEARAB Argentina es evitar de manera firme y contundente que alguien intente importar conflictos ajenos al sentimiento y la idiosincracia del Pueblo Argentino, principalmente si estos conflicts provienen del Mundo Árabe" (Adalberto Assad, 2013).

minority members who stayed in the country, migrants tend to be more radical."[27] In addition, most scholarship focuses on the majority of Middle Eastern immigrants who settled in North America, Western Europe, and Australia, states in which they tend to enjoy religious liberty and freedom of expression, both of which facilitate open political activity.[28] The combination of these freedoms with a commitment to an unrealistic, idealized objective untainted by the daily experience of living in the home country may contribute to more active, radical politics. Different trends may be evident, or simply unstudied, in countries with smaller diaspora communities and fewer freedoms.

Unlike in Argentina, evidence from the Lebanese community in Senegal suggests that there are politically active communities within the Lebanese diaspora. The Lebanese community in Senegal has sought to influence Lebanese politics through institutional activism, remittances to Lebanon and attempts to influence Senegalese policy towards Lebanon; the Lebanese community, during a protest, demanded that the Senegalese president "ask all the other presidents to turn up their noses at the UN Security Council and to subsequently close the Israeli embassy in Senegal."[29] The broad extent of political activism among the Lebanese-Senegalese suggests that political activism does occur in the Lebanese diaspora. Further, such activism is not unheard of in the history of the Lebanese-Argentine community. In the early 20th century, the Lebanese-Argentine community had a thriving political press and frequently held public

[27] Elizabeth Picard, "Conclusion: Nation-Building and Minority Rights in the Middle East," *Religious Minorities in the Middle East.* (2012): 230-255; While Picard's text discusses primarily the political and national identities of minority groups residing in the Middle East (as referenced in the title of the work), it also contains a brief discussion of the political radicalization of diaspora groups.
[28] Ibid 18; Koinova, "Conflict-generated diasporas," 442
[29] Mara A. Leichtman, "Migration, War and the Making of a Transnational Lebanese Shi'i Community in Senegal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 42 (2010): 269-290.

demonstrations, protests and celebrations.[30] However, the responses from Majida, the JUCAL youth and FEARAB all suggest that political activism has significantly decreased in Argentina over the past century.

In addition to the personal comments from Majida, the JUCAL members and Assad, the decline of the Lebanese-Argentine political press provides more concrete evidence of the decline of political activism among the diaspora community during the second half of the 20th century. Between 1894 and 1950, at least 78 newspapers focused on Middle Eastern culture and politics[31] were founded in Argentina.[32] However, today, the publications are much more limited; FEARAB lists only four publications[33], only one of which, *al-Watan*, focuses on providing news on current events in Arab countries and within the Arab-Argentine community.[34] The lack of information on these publications suggests that they are not as prevalent today as they were historically.

One possible explanation for the decrease in Lebanese political activism is the worldwide increase in anti-Arab prejudice in response to the 9/11 attacks and the resulting "War on Terror." A side effect of the focus on worldwide terrorism encouraged diaspora communities to limit their

[30] Hyland, "'Arisen from Deep Slumber'"547-574.
[31] Included in these publications were: Sada al-Yunub (1899), al-Subh (1899), al-Hakim (1908), al-Mirsal (1913), al-Istiqlal (1926), al-Alam al-Arabi (1933), Ahlan wa-Sahlan (1940), and al-Watan (1943), among others.
[32] Mercedes del Amo, "Periódicos árabes en Iberoamérica: una propuesta de recuperación y estudio." Infodiversidad. 3 (2001). 61-80.
[33] The four publications listed are: al-Watan, Realidad y Reflexión, Naschra, and Alta Política. Realidad y Reflexión reports on religious concerns of Muslim-Argentines, Naschra reports on activities held by the Club Sirio Libanés de Buenos Aires (the Buenos Aires Syrian-Lebanese Club) and Alta Política reports on Argentine foreign relations.
[34] While FEARAB's list may not be comprehensive, the organization's broad scope and its connections to Arab-Argentine institutions throughout Buenos Aires suggest that the organization would likely be informed about all available publications. Additional searches supported this conclusion; the FEARAB list is one of the only lists of Arab-Argentine publications available, and all other lists refer only to historical publications; FEARAB Argentina. "Publicaciones Gráficas y on-line." Accessed Feb 17, 2014. <http://www.fearab.org.ar/medios_publicaciones_graficas_y_online.php#pr_ciudad_bsas>; Observatorio de Colectividades: Buenos Aires, mosaico de identidades,"La colectividad en los medios," <http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/secretaria_gral/colectividades/?secInterna=107&subSeccion=335&col=26>

political activism, despite their tendency to support more radical ideas.[35] In Argentina, prejudices do play a role in attitudes towards Middle Eastern diaspora communities in the northwestern provinces and the Triple Frontera area around the border with Brazil and Paraguay.[36] It is possible that these prejudices encourage members of the Lebanese-Argentine community to suppress their political opinions and identities in order to avoid stigmatization.

Argentine history and politics provide an additional explanation for the decline in political activism. From 1976 to 1983, under the "Last Dictatorship, " or during the "Dirty War," Argentine politics were focused on the suppression of all identities and beliefs contrary to those of the military government.[37] This political climate was not conducive to the expression of Lebanese-Argentine political agendas:

> The politics of the 'Dirty War' in Argentina brutally reinforced the fact that all 'other' identities had to be subordinated to the Argentine version of 'good citizen' determined by the military. The ideal citizen was apolitical, individualistic, middle class, consumerist and nation-fearing. Even the Argentine-Lebanese elite, amongst the most respectable, wealthy and assimilated, found that they could not protect themselves from the ruthlessness of national renewal under the Argentine military.[38]

It is possible, then, that political activity among the Lebanese-Argentine diaspora community was suppressed during this period and members of the community learned to limit their activism

[35] Koinova, "Conflict-generated Diasporas," 449.
[36] Michael Humphrey, "Lebanese Identities: Between Cities, Nations and Trans-Nations," Arab Studies Quarterly, 26.1 (2004): 31-47.
[37] Jerry W. Knudson, "Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983," *Latin American Perspectives,* 24.6 (1997): 93-112.
[38] Humphrey, "Lebanese Identities," 37.

for the sake of safety. To express political opinions could have led to death and activism would have meant almost certain death.

The timing of the Last Dictatorship may also have prevented the additional influx of politically minded immigrants and thus limited the expansion or renewal of Lebanese-Argentine transnational politics. The Last Dictatorship (1976-1983) coincided with the early years of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Between 1970 and 1990, the foreign-born population of Argentina (excluding individuals born in neighboring South American countries) plummeted from approximately 1.6 million to 800,000 or from 7.2% of the total population to 2.4%.[39] During the same years, more than 990,000 people left Lebanon, many of whom were "more educated and more politically vocal than their predecessors."[40] Considering the sharp decline of Argentina's foreign-born population and the general hostility of Argentine politics during this time, it appears that, of the hundreds of thousands of Lebanese emigrants during the Civil War, few joined the Lebanese-Argentine diaspora community. As such, the community was not supplemented by a new wave of politically active immigrants like those that settled in other parts of the world.

While there are historical and political rationales for the lack of a strongly expressed political identity among the Lebanese-Argentine community, the reason for the apolitical responses may also be rooted in the nature of the subject. In any country, politics are a personal, emotional, often controversial topic that many individuals choose not to discuss with others outside their families and friends. In the context of today's Middle East and the complex role of the United States in Middle Eastern politics, the subject of politics shaped by prejudices and is

[39] "Población nacida en el extranjero según origen limítrofe o no limítrofe: Censos Nacionales 1869-2010" Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos. *Dirección Nacional de Migraciones de Argentina.* www.migraciones.gov.ar
[40] Koinova, "Conflict-generated Diasporas," 445.

even more charged. As such, it is possible that respondents may not have felt comfortable openly discussing their political beliefs with me, a recent acquaintance from the United States.

Religious Identity

Closely intertwined with political identity is religious identity. Because the two issues are intertwined, outsiders often frame issues in terms of religious affiliation; religion is portrayed as the most significant factor in identity. This section endeavors to understand the complex role of religion in the identities of individuals in the Lebanese diaspora, especially those living in Argentina. While religion is *a* factor in the Lebanese-Argentines' identity construction, it is only one factor among many.

Religious divisions play an important role in the political structure in Lebanon and in the political affiliations of the Lebanese people. Generally speaking, political parties can be directly linked to a specific religious affiliation: for example, the Future Movement is primarily Sunni, the Progressive Socialist Party is Druze, the Lebanese Forces and Kata'ib are Maronite Christian, and Amal and Hezbollah are primarily Shi'i.[41] The strong confessional affiliations of Lebanese political parties suggest that political party affiliation is necessarily influenced by religion in Lebanon. In addition, religious institutions provide health and education services to members of their religious communities.[42] As such, in Lebanon, religious networks and religious affiliations cannot be disentangled from political affiliations and participation. Political participation requires some form of religious identification and involvement, even for those who may not feel

[41] Daniel Corstange, "Vote Trafficking in Lebanon," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 44, no. 3 (2012): 483-505.
[42] Maurice Obeid, **"**A Lebanese Confession: Why Religious Politics is Bad for Lebanon,**"** *Kennedy School Review,* 10, (2010): 104.

that their identity is primarily rooted in their religious affiliation. This section discusses how this dynamic within Lebanon is played out in the diaspora community in Argentina.

From Majida's perspective, religious identity is distinctly separate from Lebanese national identity; the two are neither equivalent nor equal. Majida explained the dynamic between religious identity and Lebanese national identity in discussing her daughters' identities as she sees them: "My daughters always identify as Lebanese, not in terms of religion: not Muslim, not Catholic, not Druze, not anything. They feel Lebanese. That is what I taught them."[43] The distinction that Majida draws between religious and secular national identity is well-defined in her statement, but indicates different priorities than her previous comments about her hopes that her daughters would marry men of the same nationality and faith. This ambiguity suggests that in Majida's understanding, religious and national identities are of equal importance to the Lebanese-Argentine identity, but that they can be understood separately; individuals might share a common Lebanese identity without sharing a common religious identity and vice versa. From Majida's perspective, the Lebanese national identity and her Druze religious identity are separate components of her and her daughters' identities.

The fact that Majida does not place undue emphasis on her daughters' religious identity suggests that confessional politics in Lebanon cannot be generally extended to the Lebanese diaspora. The Druze community, into which Majida was born, is a closed religious community such that individuals can only be born into the Druze community and converts are not allowed.[44] The Druze religious community, therefore, can only be maintained if Druze men and women

[43] "siempre identifican mis niñas como libanesas no religiosas. Ni musulmanas, ni católicas, ni drusas, ni nada. Se sienten libanesas. Eso es lo que les enseñé" (Majida G. 2013)
[44] J. Gordon Melton, "Druze," *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*, ed. J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 917-918.

marry and raise their children within the Druze faith. In a climate of confessional politics, maintaining a robust religious community is fundamental. However, Majida expressed some contradictory sentiments about the importance of her daughters' Druze identity. In one context, she claimed that it was extremely important that her daughters marry men that share their religion, while at another moment she claimed that she taught her daughters that it was more important for them to identify as Lebanese than as Druze. These contradictory statements suggest that while she believes that religion should be an important component of her daughters' lives, and she believes that her daughters should maintain their Druze identity, the significance of this perspective is due to the personal belief that this course would be right for her daughters and not due to confessional politics and the desire to sustain the global Druze community. The implication of this de-prioritization of the Druze identity is that the emphasis on religious identity generated by confessional politics in Lebanon does not apply with such force to Lebanese individuals living in Argentina.

The idea that religious identity constructed differently for Lebanese individuals in diaspora than for those still living in Lebanon applies not only to the Lebanese Druze but also to other religious groups. José has traveled extensively throughout Lebanon and the Middle East. While visiting Lebanon, he felt that religious identity always took precedence over Lebanese national identity: "I always understood that for the Lebanese, the 'Lebanese' comes second. You're Shi'i or you're Sunni or you're Alawi or you're Maronite or you're Evangelist or you're Orthodox and *then* Lebanese."[45] José also describes a religious fervor in Lebanon – where "the defense of their religion was almost the defense of their country" – that is not equally present

[45] "Yo siempre le critiqué a los libaneses que libanés está en segundo lugar. O sos chiita o sos sunita o sos alauita o sos maronita o sos evangelista o sos ortodoxo y después libanés" (José S. 2013)

among the diaspora community in Argentina.[46] The implications of José's description of religion in Lebanon are two-fold; he suggests that religion is inextricably intertwined with national identity in Lebanon and emphasized as a fundamental part of one's identity more so than it is among the Lebanese living in Argentina. While this may not be the case in every circumstance, the fact that José perceives such a contrast between the religious climate in Lebanon and Argentina suggests that religious identities appear, at the very least, to matter more in Lebanon than in the Lebanese community in Argentina. The overall public representation of religious identities in Lebanon may differ from the expression of religious identities in Argentina.

The religious climate in Argentina is, according to José and Majida, characterized by inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence. According to José, Maronite Christians and Lebanese Muslims in Argentina respectfully share in some religious ceremonies:

> If you go to the San Marón Church when they are holding mass, the Muslims, of course, don't practice our rites, but they are there and they respect it. And when there is an Islamic celebration, we also go to the mosque. Of course, we don't kneel and pray, but we respect them. We live together well.[47]

Majida spoke of similar inter-religious respect on a personal level, saying that she regularly welcomes Lebanese individuals recently arrived from Lebanon into her home, regardless of their religious identities. The respect expressed, which also manifests itself in the social behaviors of the interviewees, suggests that the same tensions that still exist in Lebanon do not extend with the same severity to the Argentine diaspora community.

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[46] "La defensa de su religión era casi la defensa de su país" (José S. 2013)

[47] "Vos vas a la iglesia San Marón cuando hacen misa, los islámicos por supuesto no practican las ceremonias nuestras pero, sí, las respetan. Y cuando hay una festividad islámica, nosotros estamos también en la mezquita. Por supuesto, no nos arrodillamos ni rezamos, pero los respetamos. Hay una buena convivencia." (José S. 2013)

The religious collaboration, cooperation and cohabitation described by Majida and José is not exclusively characteristic of the diaspora community in Argentina. To the contrary, similar trends are evident also in the Lebanese-Senegalese diaspora community which has been traditionally characterized by the presence of a modern Maronite Church open to Lebanese Muslims and equally open Muslim institutions, both of which are central institutions in the Lebanese-Senegalese social life:

> the boundaries between "Muslim" and "Christian" melted away…As a result, inter-religious marriages became more frequent, children of different religions studied together in school, and all community members —Muslim and Christian alike— celebrated weddings, funerals, and even religious holidays together in mosques and churches.[48]

This trend of cohabitation of religious spaces by Lebanese Christians and Muslims that occurs in Argentina and Senegal demonstrates the distinctive quality of inter-religious interactions in some diaspora communities. Rather than importing inter-religious tensions, divisions and conflicts from Lebanon, diaspora communities appear to develop unique structures of inter-confessional relationships within their host countries. It is also possible that inter-religious animosities do exist within the Lebanese-Argentine diaspora community and simply did not surface within the limited scope of this research.

Despite the apparent prioritization of a secular Lebanese identity over the various confessional identities present among Argentina's Lebanese community, religion still plays a role in associational life within the community. In Buenos Aires, a wide variety of religious groups organize in institutionalized associations, including social clubs for Maronites, Orthodox

[48] Leichtman, "From Cross to Crescent," 50.

Christians, Druze, Sunni and Shiites.[49] For individuals like José, who is an active participant in the Maronite community, religious identity can serve as a foundation for the formation of social networks within the broader Lebanese-Argentine community. Religious identity, in this case, may not necessarily be the basis of an individual's construction of their Lebanese identity; however, religion can serve as a conduit through which Lebanese-Argentines interact with their Lebanese identity on a regular basis.

The role of religious identity within the Lebanese diaspora appears to differ vastly by host nation. In Senegal, as in Argentina, secular nationalism takes priority over sectarian affiliations as Maronites, Greek Orthodox Christians, and Muslims intermarry and celebrate special occasions together.[50] However, in the United States and Australia, sectarian divisions in the homeland are likewise reflected in the diaspora communities, with tensions between Lebanese individuals of different confessions.[51] The amicable relationships between different confessional groups in Argentina and Senegal suggest that individuals, in choosing the institutions they participate in and the social relationships they develop, place greater emphasis on their Lebanese nationality than on their confessional identity. However, in the United States and Australia, the divisions between religious communities suggest that religious identity takes precedence over a weaker conceptualization of secular nationality.

One possible explanation for the differences between the diaspora communities' understandings of their religious identities is the internal diversity of each community. In Argentina, the vast majority of the Lebanese community is Christians whose families arrived

[49] José S., 2013
[50] Leichtman, "From Cross to Crescent," 50.
51 Humphrey "Lebanese Identities," 41; Koinova, "Conflict-generated Diasporas," 446.

during the initial wave of immigration at the turn of the 20th century.[52] In Senegal, the vast majority are Muslims whose families arrived during the second wave of immigration during the Lebanese Civil War from 1975-1990.[53] In the United States and Australia, however, large groups of immigrants arrived during both waves, predominantly Christians in the first wave and Muslims in the second.[54] The diversity of the community facilitates contention between the early Christian arrivals and the later Muslim arrivals in the U.S. and Australia, whereas in Argentina and Senegal, the same diversity is not present to the same extent. Ultimately, Lebanese religious identities in diaspora are constructed in the host country and reflect the context of diaspora rather than simply replicating social structures of the home country.

While religious identity is a personal topic that depends strongly upon the preferences and practices of each individual, Majida and José's commentary on religious identity and theoretical discussions of Lebanese confessional identity demonstrate certain trends among the Lebanese-Argentine community. Religious identity appears to be separate from Lebanese cultural and secular national identity, though equally important on a personal level. However, in Argentina, religious identity among the Lebanese community is not a divisive political force in the ways it has historically been in Lebanon. Additionally, religious institutions and communities facilitate engagement with the Lebanese community and encourage interaction with other members of the Argentine-Lebanese community.

[52] Jozami, "The Return of the 'Turks'," 27-42.
[53] Leichtman, "Migration, War, Transnational Lebanese Shi'i Community," 276.
[54] Humphrey, "Lebanese Identities," 40; "Lebanese Americans." Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life. Ed. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby. 2nd ed. Vol. 2: Americas. Detroit: Gale, 2009. 342-344. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 17 Feb. 2014.

Cultural Practices

Institutional affiliations and social networks, including associations based on religion, demonstrate another element of the Lebanese diaspora identity, in addition to their role in religious identification. Institutions are also one component of a trend in diaspora communities in which individuals reconstruct the culture of the home country in the context of the host country. This practice includes not only the construction of institutions but also the continuation of cultural practices and/or the use of the language of the home country. This section discusses the various ways that Lebanese-Argentines have reconstructed Lebanese culture in Argentina.

For individuals of Lebanese descent, cultural reconstruction in countries other than Lebanon provides a basic opportunity to connect with a Lebanese heritage with which they may not be familiar otherwise. In general, diaspora communities establish and maintain links with the home country, a process that "involves mainly the reconstruction (or invention) of a homeland's culture, which includes the invention, revival, and restoration of cultural symbols, practices and institutions."[55] Living the culture of the home country on a daily basis, through participation in cultural institutions, interaction with other members of the diaspora community and other everyday manifestations of culture, such as food and language, is an integral part of staying connected to the country of origin.

Lebanese cultural institutions – secular and religious (as mentioned previously) – are a fundamental way in which Lebanese-Argentines engage with their Lebanese heritage and interact with fellow Lebanese-Argentines. For Majida, institutional membership is not an essential component of her identity, but she still utilizes the Lebanese-Argentine institutions as a

[55] Dalia Abdelhady, "The Myth of Return Reconsidered: Diasporic Representations of Home and Return," *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora,* ed. Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss and Paul Tabar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 133-151

channel through which to actively engage with the community and practice her Lebanese identity:

> I am always with the community. They have known me for 21 years. But I've never been a member anywhere. I'm at the parties. I'm at the meetings. The President of Lebanon came and I was there. I'm always around. I'm at any Arab or Lebanese event, but I'm not a member of any group.[56]

Majida's identity is not defined by membership in any particular social organization or cultural association; she is not officially a member of any group. Her independence from social organizations enables her to define her own Lebanese identity on her own terms, without compromising any of her beliefs to conform to the group opinion. However, as she explains, the organizations[57] provide cultural opportunities to engage with her Lebanese culture by attending social events, discussing issues relevant to the community and attending a speech by the Lebanese president. In her private life, Majida surrounds herself with all things Lebanese: a Lebanese flag hangs over the mantle in her home; she serves tabbouleh, manakish, homemade yogurt and other traditional Lebanese foods; after meals; her family listens to Lebanese-Arabic music in the house. Publicly and privately, Majida constructs a diasporic variety of Lebanese culture that allows her to constantly connect to and practice her Lebanese cultural identity.

The cultural environment that Majida constructs is a uniquely diasporic variant of Lebanese culture that reflects the blending of Lebanese and Argentine cultures rather than

[56] "Yo estoy siempre con la gente. Ellos me conocen hace 21 años. Pero jamás fui socia de ningún lado. En las fiestas estoy. En las reuniones estoy. Vino el presidente de Líbano estuve. Siempre estoy. En cualquier evento árabe-libanés estoy. Pero no soy socia de ningún club." (Majida G. 2013)

[57] Majida mentions several institutions in her discussion, including Asociación Civil Amigos Diplomáticos (Civil Association of Diplomatic Friends), Club Libanés (Lebanese Club), Asociación Beneficencia Drusa (Druze Charitable Association).

directly replicating all elements of Lebanese culture. Majida explains that her participation in Lebanese-Argentine organizations and her interactions with other members are demonstrative of differences between Lebanese culture and the reconstructed variant developed in the diaspora community in Argentina:

> I am a very sociable person. When we're in a meeting at the Embassy or somewhere, I'm always talking: meeting businessmen, meeting ambassadors. [In Lebanon] they would see that differently. They frown upon that sort of thing, but for us it's something common…[58]

In the constructed version of Lebanese culture embodied in Lebanese-Argentine institutions, Majida's institutional involvement and her interactions with ambassadors and businessmen are acceptable behaviors, whereas, she says, gender norms in Lebanon would have led to disapproval of such behavior. In reconstructing Lebanese culture, the diaspora community blended Lebanese cultural elements such as food, music, language and interests with elements of Argentine culture, including different gender norms and more tangible elements such as language, soccer rivalries and mid-afternoon pastries with dulce de leche.

For later generations of Lebanese-Argentines, institutional participation can play a much more significant role in the construction of Lebanese identity. As discussed previously, many of the members of JUCAL have never traveled to Lebanon and are not in contact with Lebanese family members. Institutional participation is one of a limited set of options allowing them to engage with their Lebanese heritage. When asked what his connection to Lebanon was, Pablo's immediate answer was directly related to institutional participation: "I participate in the

[58] **"**Soy sociable**…**estamos en una reuni**ó**n en la Embajada, o en alg**ú**n lado y estoy hablando: conociendo embajadores, conociendo empresarios**…**Eso es que ellos lo ven mal pero para nosotros es algo com**ú**n**"** (Majida G. 2013).

Lebanese Youth (JUCAL), here."[59] While he then went on to describe other elements of his relationship with Lebanon – the food, the music, his family history – Pablo's immediate jump to his participation in JUCAL is indicative of its importance in his connection with Lebanon. Participating in JUCAL gave Pablo a forum in which to engage with Lebanese culture and experience a Lebanese cultural atmosphere. As such, institutional participation allows Pablo and other Argentines of Lebanese descent that have never traveled to Lebanon to establish a relationship with Lebanon without ever having seen the country by facilitating the invention of a Lebanese cultural climate in Argentina.

Religious institutional participation also encourages Lebanese-Argentines to physically surround themselves with other Lebanese-Argentines of the same faith. According to José, in Buenos Aires, religious institutional activity is centered in specific neighborhoods of the city, with the Catholics concentrated in one neighborhood, the Druze in another and the Jews in another.[60] While there is some division between religions, the development of various neighborhoods that are dominated by Lebanese descendants consolidates and strengthens the construction of Lebanese culture in the Argentine capital, facilitating the establishment of Arabic restaurants and other cultural institutions to serve the Lebanese-Argentine community. In the neighborhoods where the Lebanese-Argentine population is concentrated, individuals are surrounded by other members of the diaspora community, all of them living together in their own reconstruction of their home country. The diaspora community reestablishes Lebanese culture in the context of Argentina, their host country.

[59] "Acá participo en la Juventud Libanesa, JUCAL" (Pablo A., 2013)
[60] José S., 2013

While the private, everyday construction of a diaspora variety of Lebanese culture is not always easily observed by a researcher from outside the community, cultural institutions allow for some analysis. The institutional reconstruction of the Lebanese community in Argentina is not unlike similar reconstruction in the Lebanese-Brazilian community. In Brazil, the diaspora community establishes its link with Lebanon through institutional reconstruction of Lebanese culture. Politically oriented associations organize around Lebanese political issues. A Lebanese press keeps the community informed about current events in Lebanon. Social institutions allow Lebanese-Brazilians to interact with other members of the community.[61] Just like the youth of JUCAL, Lebanese-Brazilian youth participate in events celebrating Lebanese culture dance, music, food and festivities.[62] In both Latin American countries, institutional reconstructions of Lebanese culture allow individuals to explore Lebanese culture without ever leaving home.

However, Lebanese cultural reconstruction appears most strongly among the Lebanese-Argentine community within their individual homes. Food and music are two commonly referenced examples of cultural reconstruction in the home. Describing his relationship with Lebanon outside the institutional context of JUCAL, Pablo focuses on the importance of Lebanese food and music: "for my family, it's mostly about the food and the dances…My grandmother taught me to make Lebanese food and that was it."[63] Food, music and dance are important components of culture that, when maintained in a new context, can serve as another point of access for regular interaction with the traditions and practices of a community's country

[61] John Tofik Karam, *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).
[62] Scott Morrison, "'Os Turcos': The Syrian-Lebanese Community of Sao Paulo, Brazil," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,* 25.3 (2005): 423-436.
[63] "por mi familia, más que todo: la comida, los bailes y danzas…Esta comida que es de Líbano, mi abuela, cuando vino, me enseñó a hacer y quedaba allí y nada más" (Pablo A. 2013)

of origin, especially among younger generations that have never directly experienced the home culture.

Customs and cultural practices can also constitute more than simply an access point for engagement with the host culture. Cultural customs and national identity can be closely intertwined among members of a diaspora community. Majida emphasized that Lebanese customs and Arabic language use are crucial in maintaining the more nebulous idea of Lebanese national identity: "I teach my daughters that they shouldn't lose their customs and they shouldn't lose their identity…To conserve their culture, to conserve their roots, to conserve a lot of things. I taught them Arabic and they know Arabic because it's their culture, it's their roots."[64] According to Majida, her daughters' Lebanese identity is directly associated with the maintenance of cultural customs, especially the maintenance of the Arabic language. The reconstruction of cultural customs in everyday life is an essential component of actively engaging with and maintaining Lebanese identity.

[64] "Y eso es lo que yo enseño: que no pierden estas costumbres y no pierden su identidad…para conservar la cultura, para conservar las raíces, para conservar muchas cosas. Incluso, yo las enseñé el árabe y ellas saben el árabe porque es la cultura de ellas, es sus raíces" (Majida G. 2013)

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Over the course of the last 150 years, various political entanglements have tied Argentina to Lebanon. It would be remiss not to consider the political events of the 1990s in any discussion of the Lebanese community in Argentina. The attacks on the AMIA and the Israeli Embassy, at a time when the profile of Middle Eastern-Argentines was rapidly rising, undoubtedly impacted the community. It would be equally negligent to ignore the direct ties to Middle Eastern politics that some early immigrants maintained throughout their lives. Early immigrants remitted their earnings back to political and community groups. Others advocated for legitimate diplomatic influence on homeland affairs. They protested and established a political press to discuss Lebanese issues. The concrete ties between Lebanon and its diaspora likely influenced members' personal and political identities. However, over the course of this study, what has become evident is that the development of a Lebanese national identity among Lebanese-Argentine individuals living in Buenos Aires today has been driven not by political entanglements, but rather by family ties, religion and cultural practices.

In understanding their heritage and their ties to their homeland, Lebanese-Argentine individuals have incorporated their family histories into their construction of their political identity. For those in contact with family members in Lebanon, family ties influence their access to information about Lebanese affairs, shaping their knowledge and opinions. For some, according to Majida and the JUCAL members, Lebanese affairs are only important in the extent to which they impact travel plans or the lives of family members in Lebanon. For others, like José, the concerns of 19th century Lebanese immigrants shaped their political behaviors in 20th century Argentina. Being Lebanese in Argentina is not defined by the presence or absence of

political ties to competing factions in Lebanon. On the contrary, it is a Lebanese-ness determined by family relationships, that influences Lebanese-Argentine political identities.

In addition to family relationships, religious beliefs also shape Lebanese national identity in Argentina. The connection, however, between religion and politics is not the most obvious link. Considering the divisive, politicized role that religion has played in Lebanese history, and the politically charged bonds that have connected Argentina to Lebanon, the suggestion that religious tensions may carry over from Lebanon into the Argentine diaspora community seems valid. However, the opposite appears to be true; in Argentina, secular, nationalist Lebanese identity takes precedence over potentially divisive religious identity, leading to a climate of religious tolerance, cooperation and even comingling in religious ceremonies among Lebanese-Argentines of various creeds. Political tensions between confessional groups in Lebanon do not translate into the Argentine context. Instead, a notable trend of inter-confessional comingling has developed in which the Lebanese-Argentine community identifies as a single, united, secular, Lebanese community governed without conflicting religious sects.

Cultural practices and participation in cultural institutions can also shape Lebanese-Argentine political behavior. In general, any active participation in Lebanese affairs is carried out through participation in cultural institutions. For many of the Lebanese-Argentine youth, institutional participation is the behavior they engage in that is distinctly derived from their Lebanese identity. For the older generations, like Majida and José, Lebanese cultural institutions allow them to participate and engage with Lebanese issues in ways that would not be possible in the context of their home country. In Lebanese-Argentine cultural institutions, engagement with Lebanese issues is not hampered by exclusive gender norms and religious divisions. To the contrary, the diaspora construction of a Lebanese-Argentine culture allows the community to set

the agenda and define the terms of their engagement with Lebanese affairs. In doing so, the diaspora community defines unique political identities that are based more on the diaspora's hybrid culture than on the political interactions between homeland and host country.

Throughout this study, Lebanese-Argentine interviewees denied having a Lebanese-Argentine political identities or affiliations. They did not define themselves by the political occurrences that are glaringly obvious to the outside observer. Nevertheless, in following the news about Lebanon and caring about the fate of their home country, the community demonstrated by their behavior that they do indeed have some form of political interest and involvement. That political identity, however, was a uniquely Lebanese-Argentine one defined on the community's own terms and shaped by their family relationships, religious beliefs and cultural practices, rather than the political interactions of the Lebanon and Argentina.

The Lebanese-Argentine diaspora identity is more than a simple intersection of Lebanon with Argentina. Rather, the diaspora's identity – its sense of belonging to a single group and loving a distant homeland – is constructed in the ways that family, religion and culture intersect with nationality and politics. Belonging to the diaspora community does not mean interpreting the events of 1990s Argentina in a particular way or supporting a particular Lebanese political party. Rather, it involves identifying with one simple statement made by a young woman who has lived in Argentina her whole life but still holds her roots dear:

"Soy de Argentina y tengo un alma libanesa."

"I am from Argentina, and I have a Lebanese soul."

Appendix One: Interview Questionnaire

Interview group: Representatives of the Lebanese-Argentine community in Buenos Aires

Objective: Understand the personal constructions of Lebanese diaspora identity, particularly the political elements of this identity.

Themes:

Migratory trajectory and relationship with the country of origin – How does the interviewee relate with the country of origin, historically and presently?

Q1. When did you/your family arrive in Argentina? Where did your family immigrate from? How many members of your family came to Argentina? Do you still have relatives in your country of origin?

Q2. Why did you/your family come to Argentina? Did you have economic, political, religious, familial or cultural motives?

Q3. How did your parents /grandparents relate with their country of origin?

Q4. How do you relate with your country of origin? Do you follow the news, travel to the country and/or participate in a cultural organization?

Perspective on politics – How does the interviewee construct/interpret Middle Eastern politics? What perspective does he/she have with respect to the conflict?

Politics in Lebanon

Q1. How do you view the political situation in Lebanon? What is your opinion on that situation?

Q2. Which conflict or political event in Lebanon/the Middle East interests/impacts you the most?

Q3. How do you access information about political events in the Middle East?

Q4. What role does Middle Eastern politics play in your everyday life?

Q5. Specifically, what role does the Arab-Israeli Conflict play?

Related events in Buenos Aires:

Q1. Do you believe that the conflict in the Middle East impacts Argentina in any way?

Q2. How do you remember the attacks on the AMIA and the Israeli Embassy?

Q3. How do you view the attacks on the AMIA and the Israeli Embassy? What is your opinion about the attacks?

Q4. Do you believe that there is a connection between the attacks in Buenos Aires and the conflict in the Middle East? How would you explain this connection?

Q5. Did the attacks have an impact on your everyday life?

Q6. How do you think the aforementioned political events can affect the global Lebanese community? The Lebanese-Argentine community?

Identity – How does the interviewee self-identify?

Q1. What does it mean to you to be Lebanese?

Q2. To what groups would you say that you belong? Lebanese? Argentine? Religious groups? Other groups?

Q3. Overtime have you felt more or less connected to different groups? How so?

Q4. How are the different groups you identify with evident in your everyday life? How do you participate in the life of these groups?

Q5. What role do cultural institutions play in the manifestation of the Lebanese identity in Argentina? How is this institutional life related to the structure of the Lebanese community in the Middle East?

Appendix Two: Complete List of Interviews

Adalberto Assad, interview by Lindsay Miller, April 6, 2013.

José S., interview by Lindsay Miller with Ana Laura Lobo, May 31, 2013.

JUCAL Members, group interview by Lindsay Miller, May 25, 2013.

Majida G., interview by Lindsay Miller, May 16, 2013.

Pablo A., interview by Lindsay Miller, May 25, 2013.

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